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THE INDEPENDENT

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WEATHER: Mainly dry (IRASP) 40p

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Thorpe's friends and a murder conspiracy page 14

The Tabloid
The return of Jesus Christ Superstar

The Tabloid
Bridget Jones: more man trouble

350 die as airliners collide

Fireballs over Indian town after worst-ever mid-air crash

Agencies New Delhi
Hundreds of charred bodies, many still burning, were strewn around a village west of New Delhi last night after a Saudi jumbo jet collided with a Kazakh airliner in a massive explosion. It was feared that 351 people had been killed in what would be the third-worst air crash ever and the worst mid-air collision.

A report from Chandigarh, near the site of the disaster, said 200 charred bodies, including those of the pilots of the Saudi Boeing and one air hostess, had been found.

About 200 bodies, most of them burning, were sighted at the spot, where relief and salvage operations were being hampered due to darkness, the Press Trust of India said.

Villagers near Charkhi Dabri, a town of 50,000 surrounded by flat farmland, said that the impact of the crash had created a 10ft-deep crater over an area of about 330 square feet at the site, about 50 miles south-west of New Delhi.

A building contractor Rao Singh witnessed the crash. "I saw fireballs and big black smoke about three or four kilometres from my house falling into the fields," he said. "The sky was absolutely red."

One aviation source described the aftermath of the collision as "like a bolt of lightning - two streaks of fire descended down to the ground". Another witness said: "I saw a ball of flame hurtling down and I could make out that it was an aircraft." Police cordoned off the area as rescue vehicles went to the site.

Ranjan Chatterjee, chairman of the Airports Authority of India, told a news conference: "We have not heard of any survivors so far. It seems rather difficult, unfortunately." The PTI reported that three survivors were pulled from the wreckage but they had all died on the way to hospital.

The collision between the 747 and the Kazakh plane took place after nightfall. Saudi Airways flight SV763 took off from New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport at 6.33pm, bound for Doha and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It had 312 passengers and crew on board. The plane was cleared to climb to 14,000ft. Seven minutes after take-off, it collided with the Kazakh aircraft, flight KZA1907 from Shymkent, which was making its landing approach. The Kazakh airliner had 39 people on board, said officials.

HS Khola, India's director general of civil aviation, said: "At about 18.40 (1340 GMT), the radar blip of both aircraft was lost."

Indian reports at first said the Kazakh flight was a Tupolev-154, but officials in Kazakhstan said the flight of the same number was usually an Ilyushin-76 cargo plane.

The weather in Delhi was normal for the time of year, and there was no immediate word on the cause of the collision. The Indian government ordered a judicial inquiry.

A Boeing spokesman in Everett, Washington, Doug Webb, said the 747-100 had been delivered to Saudi Airways in 1982. It was configured to carry 377 passengers. Mr Webb said he had no information on the plane's service record, whether it was equipped with crash-avoidance device or what may have caused the collision.

Until Friday's crash, the third-deadliest crash was the 1974 accident outside Paris involving a Turkish DC-10 which killed 346 people.

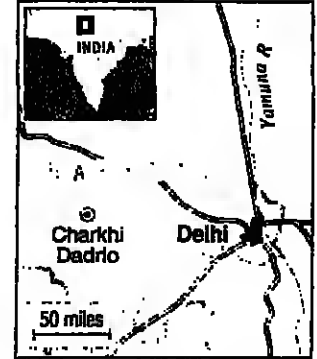
The Saudi airline's last disaster was in August 1990 when a Lockheed TriStar caught fire at Riyadh airport shortly before take-off. All 301 people aboard were killed.

Until yesterday's collision, India had been regarded as having good air-traffic-control systems.

"Pilots have been reasonably happy with conditions in India," said Tony Myers, administration and finance officer of the Surrey-based International Federation of Airline Pilots. "We have had no particular complaints about the area." There were areas where

pilots were deeply concerned about safety, but India was not one of them, said Chris Darke, general secretary of the British Airline Pilots' Association.

Further reports, page 9



Major goes into battle on Brussels 'dictatorship'

Anthony Bovens and Sarah Helm
John Major yesterday made Brussels 'dictatorship' over Westminster a central battleground for the next election, after the European Court threw out Britain's objections to the 48-hour Working Time Directive.

"What I object to is working conditions being dictated from Brussels when they should be determined here in this House," the Prime Minister told the Commons to loud Tory cheers.

But the consensus in both Brussels and Westminster last night was that Mr Major was striking a posture for political effect, to help him unite his own party and to paint Labour as a

party of Brussels poodles. Mr Major said that unless the United Kingdom was exempted from the directive, and all further attempts at imposed "social engineering", he would veto the new European treaty currently being negotiated by the 15 member states.

Mocking Mr Major's stance, Tony Blair told MPs: "Isn't this just back to beef, where, five months on, they've not even got the gelatine ban lifted?"

It was the old tactic, the Labour leader said. "They seize on an issue, they talk tough, they alienate everybody, and then they cave in. The law which gives the right to people for a minimum holiday is not the issue upon which to launch Beef War Mark 2."

Liberal Democrat MP Menzies Campbell said: "Britain will never influence Europe so long as it sulks in its tent."

Tory Euro-sceptics jumped at the chance to demand a further round of EC-style non-cooperation, which was immediately ruled out by Mr Major. The most outspoken critic, Teresa Gorman, told *The Independent*: "The Prime Minister is in the position of the eunuch; he can't do anything. They have ways of making us conform."

From the other side of the Tory divide, Edwina Currie said: "Thumping the table in Europe is childish, petulant and useless. It makes our partners turn away in disgust and

they no longer listen to the serious points we make."

Deep scepticism was also shown in Brussels, where British officials immediately demanded an "opt-out" from the directive.

Almost as soon as the court's decision was delivered, Sir Stephen Wall, Britain's ambassador to the European Union, tabled proposals for the opt-out at a meeting of the inter-governmental conference (IGC), which is up-dating the Maastricht Treaty.

Sir Stephen also demanded that the new treaty should rewrite health and safety powers, currently governed by majority voting, to allow a national

veto. The demands for a new working hours "opt-out", to extend the existing social chapter opt-out, and for a veto of further health and safety measures, are highly unlikely to be agreed by other European member states in their IGC talks - which are not scheduled to be concluded until next June.

As Mr Blair pointed out in the Commons, that "conveniently" followed an expected May election, which the Conservatives could lose.

Ian Lang, President of the Board of Trade, told the Commons: "This House should not seek to disobey the law. We obey the law until we can secure a change in it, and we are determined to secure that change in the law through lawful means."

Mr Lang said earlier that the Government expected to take two to three months to consult business and industry about the implementation of the new law, which would then be speedily introduced, in a matter of weeks, by Statutory Instrument.

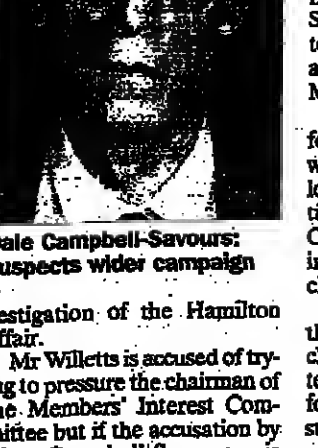
Underlining the importance of the battle, Mr Major sent a letter to Jacques Santer, the Commission President, and his 14 fellow-leaders, warning them of the fight ahead. "I attach the utmost importance to these amendments," he said, "and I shall insist that they form

part of the outcome of the inter-governmental conference."

A buoyant Pádraig Flynn, European commissioner for social affairs, confirmed yesterday that the Commission is now planning to propose an extension of the working hours directive to workers currently exempted, including junior doctors, fishermen and transport workers.

Mr Flynn hit back at Mr Major, who has accused the Commission of bringing in the working hours measure through the "back door", saying Britain was now trying to "break down the door" by rewriting the treaty in the IGC.

Leading article, page 13



Whips conspired to get Hamilton off the hook

He told Mr Willets: "I put it to you that there was a deliberate, very effective effort made by the whips' office... to try to influence this inquiry."

On the second day of the committee hearing evidence from Mr Willets, Mr Campbell-Savours surprised the committee by producing a new memo allegedly written by Mr Mitchell.

Mr Campbell-Savours, MP for Workington, said the memo was written by Mr Mitchell following the publication of an article in *The Independent* on 24 October 1994 under the heading of "Hamilton failed to declare payments".

In the article, the paper said that Mr Hamilton failed to declare in the register of MPs interests a paid-for consultancy for a public relations firm with strong links to southern Africa.

The memorandum from Mr Mitchell, dated the same day, was headed "The Independent article on Hamilton" and is

investigation of the Hamilton affair.

Mr Willets is accused of trying to pressure the chairman of the Members' Interest Committee but if the accusation by Mr Campbell-Savours is proved, it suggests there was a concerted attempt by the whips office to sideline the inquiry.

Andrew Marr, page 15

Where a 48-hour week is a luxury

The decision of the European Court on the 48-hour working week was greeted with interest and amusement by junior doctors who are excluded from the Working Time Directive, writes Liz Hunt. They agree completely with the two British scientists who gave evidence to the Court that excess hours are bad for health.

In Dr Huw Thomas (left), a 24-year-old junior doctor of just three months' experience, a 48-hour working week is an impossible dream. He works a 72-hour week in the second busiest cancer department in Britain; he is on call every fourth night, entailing a continuous shift of 48 hours. He sleeps when he can.

"When you are tired you are a bit slower but you know you are under pressure and the adrenaline flows, which balances the tiredness," he said.

Photograph: Dale Cherry



QUICKLY
Lending rate up
A million home-owners will have to pay more for their mortgages from next month following the decision by the Nationwide building society to raise its standard lending rate by 0.25 per cent. to 6.75 per cent.

More guns money
The Government announced in the Commons increased compensation of up to £100m for the owners of handguns to be destroyed after the Dunblane massacre.

IRA's bomb haul
Scotland Yard's anti-terrorist branch has said it is urgently trying to track down an IRA unit which is thought to have armed itself with bomb-making equipment or firearms during a raid on a series of self-storage units in West London. The IRA's haul is believed to have included Semtex.

Bishop's tax call
An evangelical bishop called for tax allowances for families which would encourage parents to stay at home. The Bishop of Hull, the Rt Rev James Jones, said that the present system penalised parents.

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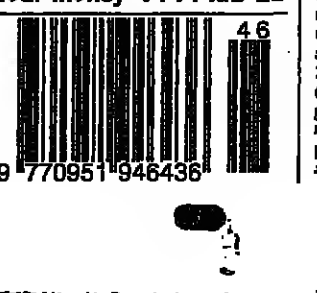
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news

significant shorts

Irish minister faces renewed calls to quit

Ireland's justice minister, Nora Owen, was last night under growing pressure to quit as a scandal deepened over her department's failure to leave a judge hearing terrorist cases after he was technically retired and ineligible to sit on the bench.

Her position was further undermined when a series of prisoners, including suspected republicans facing explosives charges and extradition proceedings, were granted judicial review of the legality of their detention.

The Daily last night began a two-day confidence debate in the three-party coalition Government, forced by an Opposition no-confidence challenge to Ms Owen, the Attorney General, Dermot Glavin, and the Taoiseach, John Bruton. Alan Murdoch

Road attack man better

Police hope to be able to speak soon to Simon Willmott, who was critically injured when a concrete block was dropped through the windscreen of his car as he was driving along the M3 motorway in Hampshire.

The 22-year-old, from Bagshot, Surrey, who suffered severe chest injuries in the incident last month, has made such good progress that he was transferred yesterday from the Royal Brompton Hospital, London, to his local Frimley Park Hospital. Police are treating the incident as attempted murder.

No Coltrane in 'Cracker'

Granada has been commissioned to take *Cracker* to the US, but Robbie Coltrane will not be repeating his award-winning role. It is the first British production company to be commissioned by one of the big four US networks. The one-hour pilot episode begins filming in the spring for screening next year and 1998.

Tanker pilot wins appeal over disaster

John Pearn, the Milford Haven pilot found guilty of incompetence after the tanker *Sea Empress* ran aground as it entered the west Wales port last February, spilling 70,000 tonnes of crude oil, had an appeal upheld yesterday, prompting criticism of the port authority and sparking a call for its chairman to resign.

To date, the disaster has cost the Pembrokeshire economy an estimated £1.5m, mainly in lost tourist revenue. A report by the Department of Transport's Marine Accident Investigation Branch is due to be published next year. Tony Heath

Father Adrian McLeish, 45, who showed no emotion throughout the day-long hearing, admitted 12 charges of indecency with boys under 14. He had also pleaded guilty to six charges of distributing indecent pictures of children under 16 by means of the Internet.

Paedophile priest jailed

The threat to Christmas mail receded yesterday when leaders of 130,000 postal workers finally agreed a peace deal to end their long-running dispute over working practices.

Alan Johnson, joint general secretary of the Communication Workers' Union said he was confident his members would accept the peace formula in a ballot over the next few weeks.

As part of the proposed settlement, management has dropped its insistence on the introduction of "team-working" - the main bone of contention. Barrie Clement

Breakthrough in post dispute

The main mast of the Cutty Sark being dismantled for restoration after the discovery of corrosion. The mast dates from 1957 when the 19th-century clipper was opened to the public at Greenwich, south-east London. Photograph: Philip Meech

Whipped to fury by spectre of the jackboot



DAVID AARONOVITCH

As you walk into the MPs' suite of offices at 7 Millbank the airlock doors hiss shut behind you. Then it's past the green copper bust of Sir Edward Heath, straight ahead, turn right, right again and into the meeting room that the eight former whipless wonders - the Praetorian Guard of Europhobia - were using for their press conference about the latest judgment of the federalising European Court.

As I sat down, the young man in front of me was subjected to narrow-eyed questioning by one of the organisers: who was he working for?

You could see why there were grounds for suspicion. Blond haired, blue-eyed and

tall, it was not difficult to imagine this chap - sporting a funny armband - singing "the future belongs to me" in a Bavarian Biergarten.

Within minutes of the press conference ending he would be reporting to his controller at the German Embassy. "Heil Helmut!" they greet each other.

"Ah, Gerhard", the man with the duelling scar would say, "vot are ze vippleschweinhunde up to now?"

Then Gerhard would tell him. That Nick Budgen spoke of "betrayal" by Europe; John Wilkinson of Britain being "at the crossroads" - a satrapy of a European Federal state; Teddy Taylor of "democratic outrage" ("when will the breaking point come?"); Tony Marlow of "who governs Britain?"; St Teresa of Gorman of "the credibility of the Prime Minister"; Christopher Gill revealed that "all those on the continent want is to see the subjugation of our country".

"Der Teufel!" exclaims the scarred controller, his schnapps trembling in his gloved hand. "zey haf us ge-rumbled. Vot are zey planning to do?" And Gerhard, a humourless smile on his thin Teutonic lips, replies: "Actually, not a lot. They will support a government policy of non-cooperation with Europe, like over beef!" They both laugh, nastily. And if Herr Major does not stick to his guns? Will they withdraw support?

Gerhard muses his answer to this question. Like me, he will have heard Nick Budgen say that the right will not withdraw. But he will also have overheard Richard Body mutter "not yet!" and seen Teresa's face become like a Greek mask of tragedy, her mouth turned down in misery, and subcon-

scious twitches and grimaces testifying to the torment within.

While the two Germans settled down to compose their report to Berlin, I went to see Act Two of the latest Euro-crisis played out at Prime Minister's Question Time.

Some of the tattered battle-flags that had been waved before the battle of Florence (where our obstinacy, if you recall, was to win the best war) were held aloft again.

Under their shade, the Prime Minister said he would insist, world demand, was not prepared to allow would-halt all progress unless. There would be no end to the IGC ("an endless IGC?", says Gerhard. "It sounds wunderbar!").

"I'm not going to accept this nonsense," said JM, in reply to Tony Blair. "I have written to the European Commission."

But why, asked Sir David Steel, was he getting his knickers in such a twist? Had not Gillian Shephard in 1992 (when Employment Secretary) said of the working hours directive, "In a word we've won. The UK has secured all its key objectives?"

Ah, Mr Major didn't say, but much has moved on since then. There is a new game: my MP hit me with balloons on the ends of sticks, and I hit Brussels with balloons on the ends of sticks. It may not be dignified, but as Politik goes, it is Real.

Semtex haul: Terrorists hit London warehouse

IRA gang raid arsenal of guns and explosives

Jason Bennett
Crime Correspondent

An IRA gang raided a warehouse in London to recover a cache of guns and explosives left behind by another terrorist unit, according to anti-terrorism chiefs.

The three-man team used bolt cutters to force open 55 storage units before they found the arsenal of weapons, which are believed to have been left there by terrorists from a previous operation.

Enough explosives, probably Semtex, and equipment to make a number of bombs are believed to have been removed in the raid. The seizure comes after security services and anti-terrorism chiefs warned that the IRA is preparing a pre-Christmas terrorist campaign.

A security guard was overpowered and a surveillance camera system deactivated during the break-in, which took place last Friday in Hammer-smith, west London. Police last night appealed to the public for help and issued an impression of one of the raiders.

Commander John Grieve, head of the Anti-Terrorist Branch, said: "We have strong grounds to believe that something of considerable value to these men - possibly bomb-making equipment and firearms - may have been removed from at least one of the storage units."

"They were looking for something - they knew precisely what they were looking for."

Cmdr Grieve said that evidence left at the scene of the crime indicated that the IRA was responsible. Forensic experts are examining the unit for traces of explosives.

The break-in may be linked to previous anti-terrorism operations. An IRA member, Diarmuid O'Neill, 27, who was shot dead during a series of police dawn raids in west London and

The men, who are believed to have put on fake accents and who wore rubber gloves, removed armloads of heavy objects before making their getaway. The security guard managed to free himself shortly after his attackers left and called the police.

A description of one of the men is of a white male aged 20-25 years, and 5ft 11in in height. He was wearing a black jacket and a dark woolly hat. The other two wore stocking masks. The police are particularly anxious to hear from anyone who may have seen the three men leave the premises and perhaps get into a car.

Cmdr Grieve asked specifically if people had sold a vehicle in suspicious circumstances or if they are renting residential or commercial property to "suspicious tenants". He also asked if people had recently let or re-let storage premises.

He added: "We are in for some dangerous months and it's on the back of that and this strong belief, that this was the work of Provisional IRA that we seek the public's help."

The operation took place at 5.40pm at storage units in Shepherd's Bush Place.

The men overpowered and handcuffed a security guard, who suffered from shock and

bruising, but was not seriously hurt. They then disabled closed-circuit television, and went through 55 of the 200 storage units before finding the suspected bomb-making equipment. The police said the men left a huge amount of debris as they quickly tore through the units, which were individually fired out to store a variety of items, including furniture.

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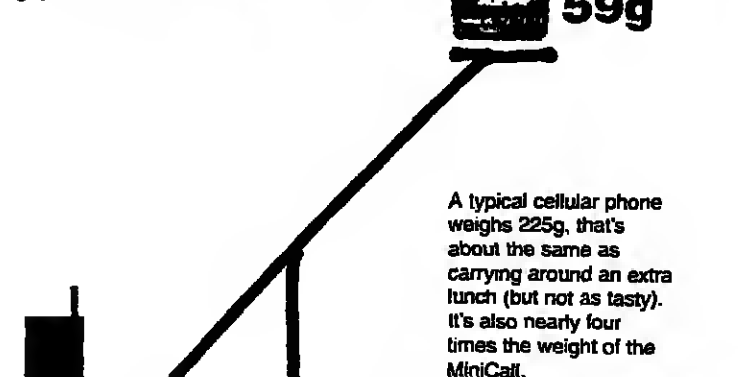
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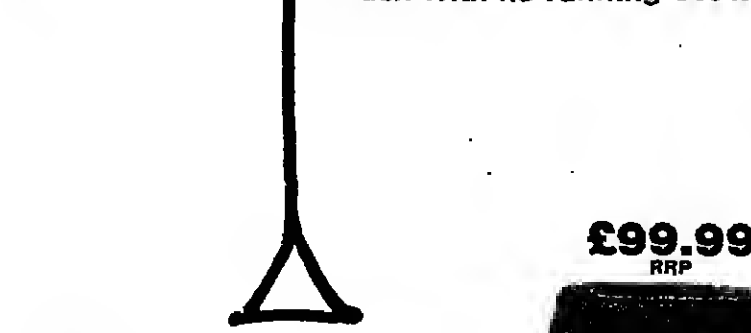
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'Would you want this man as an enemy if your political career depended on his support?'

Christian Wolmar on the Tory MP who became the one-man scourge of David Willetts

Quentin Davies is a member of the Tory awkward squad. David Willetts, the Paymaster-General, was visibly shaken by his fierce grilling at the hands of Mr Davies in the hearings of the Committee of Standards and Privileges. He is also a member of the Treasury select committee and his questioning technique has certainly earned the admiration of fellow members there, one of whom, Labour MP Diane Abbott, described him as "like a ferret down a rat-hole".

Mr Davies is not a man to have as your enemy when your political career depends on his vote. He has shown, in voting against the whip on the vote on the Scott inquiry, that he is prepared to go all the way and clearly Mr Willetts's ministerial career is dependent on Mr Davies not repeating that re-

bellion by voting, with his Labour colleagues, to recommend to the House that Mr Davies should be suspended.

At Monday's hearing Mr Willetts started off questioning Mr Davies with a sort of "nothing personal, guy just doing my duty" explanation, but then launched into the type of cross-examination more associated with prosecution lawyers. Mr Davies not only called Mr Willetts's explanation "implausible" but made it clear, in the whole tone of his questioning, that he felt that Mr Willetts was a liar.

It is not the first time that Mr Davies, a merchant banker by trade, has given witnesses a hard time. On the Treasury Se-

lect Committee he made Eddie George, the governor of the Bank of England, very uncomfortable when the committee examined the collapse of Barings bank, again using the word "plausible".

Mr Abbott said: "Once he is convinced of a case intellectually, nothing will sway him from it." This explains why Mr Davies was the only Tory rebel on the vote on the Scott inquiry last February which was only won because fellow rebel Rupert Allason voted at the last minute to go into the Tory lobby.

According to Mr Abbott: "He is not from the *salon des refusés* like the other Tory rebels. He is doing it out of principle. He read

every word of the Scott report, unlike most of his colleagues, and that's why he felt he couldn't vote for the Government on it."

Several of Mr Davies's friends in the House are amused that he has not achieved ministerial office since he was elected for Stamford and Spalding in 1987 given that his ability and intelligence testify on a par with that of the highly thought-of Mr Willetts. There are two possible explanations, his pro-European views which were expressed in a pamphlet written for the Macdonald Group published this summer, and his rather patrician air. As one Tory backbencher put it, "He is all public school and la-di-da ac-

cents. That doesn't go down well in the grey world of Mr Major."

It seems that having seen many less able colleagues attain ministerial office before him, Mr Davies decided to show his spurs by being troublesome. He did this after Labour colleagues suggested that he needed to raise his profile, since he was getting nowhere by toying the line.

A friend of Mr Davies's added: "He is a very honourable man. He is not doing this out of bitterness, but because he believes that Parliament should put the flag out for high standards. He feels that public perception of Parliament is at a low point and it is his duty to help ensure that this changes."

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Quentin Davies: Inquisitor

Growing death risk for Gulf War troops

Ian Burrell

Troops who served in the Gulf War are 30 per cent more likely to die from accidents, suicide or murder than other servicemen, according to new research revealed yesterday.

The Gulf War Inter-Parliamentary Group released details of a study funded by the US government into the causes of deaths of soldiers since the war. Dr Han Kang, a senior official in the US Department of Veterans' Affairs, found that Gulf veterans were 1.3 times more likely to die from acci-

dents, suicide or homicide, than troops who did not go to the Gulf. The trend was even more pronounced among women.

The findings were obtained by Dr Norman Jones, a medical adviser to the Royal British Legion, which along with other servicemen's charities sponsored him on a tour of America to assess the latest medical research on Gulf illnesses.

Dr Jones's subsequent report, yesterday prompted a forthright attack on the Ministry of Defence by Edwina Currie, the former health minister, who sits on the all-party parliamen-

tary group. She said: "There is no doubt now that something adverse happened to a large number of our troops out there in the Gulf. The MoD should never discount reports of problems from veterans. They should at all times take seriously remarks made by those returning from fields of conflict." Although the MoD was finally admitting to a problem, "the tragedy is that it has taken so long."

Hilary Meredith, a solicitor who also sits on the parliamentary group, said Dr Kang's findings were highly important. "Look at the ages of those who

have died," she said. "It cannot be right that these people who were so physically fit when they went are dying at such a young age so soon after coming back."

Major Ian Hill, chairman of the National Gulf Veterans and Families Association, said 92 British Gulf veterans had died since the war. Major Hill, 50, who has himself become seriously ill, said: "My reactions are so impaired now that I would be lethal if I drove a car."

"But you have still got a lot of serving guys who have not come to terms with it yet. They are trying to work through their

symbols because they do not want to lose their careers and their homes."

A total of 1,200 Gulf veterans are suing the MoD for compensation for their illnesses, which they believe were caused by chemicals that they were exposed to, either as in-oculants or nerve agents.

The Labour MP Alf Morris accused the Government of being far less concerned than the US about trying to find the causes of the illnesses. "There has been far more dash and a much greater sense of urgency across the Atlantic."

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Smart set opt for the prawn cocktail

Claire Garner

It sounds like a recipe for dinner party disaster. Prawn cocktail, followed by chicken Kiev, rounded off with Black Forest Gateau – the culinary equivalent of dancing in flares to the Brotherhood of Man.

But such gastronomic clichés are making a comeback. Along with gammon and pineapple, duck à l'orange and sherry trifle, they are cropping up on some of London's swankiest menus. Today's edition of *Eat* magazine, the style magazine for foodies, claims that the capital's coolest chefs are rediscovering Seventies dinner party favourites. "Nico Ladenis does tournedos Rossini, Marco Pierre White has done chicken Kiev and yesterday I enjoyed prawn cocktail at the Halcyon," said Alan Crompton-Batt, a restaurant



A star is prawn again

guru who spotted the "Retro cuisine" trend.

Anthony Worrall Thompson, the chef/proprietor who has opened several London restaurants serving modern Mediterranean food, says "gutsy" food has replaced "poncy" food. When he took over the Italian restaurant De Cecco earlier this year, regular customers were worried that his tastes would be too avant-garde. They signed a petition to keep avocado prawn on the menu.

They need not have worried. Mr Worrall Thompson said he has nothing against "Kitsch Kitchen" – provided the ingredients are good. "Melon boats with the orange sails – they sum up us struggling to find our way with cooking," he said. "But when you get a really good bit of melon in season, there's nothing to beat Parma ham and melon."

But these 1970s staples still go down badly in some restaurants. Rose Gray, of the River Café, in west London, said: "My God! There's nothing much that we do in that line. I would never, ever do prawn cocktail in a million years. If I was going to do prawns, I'd grill them and put fresh chilli and fennel seed and olive oil on them. That would be my prawn cocktail."

But for some, Retro food has never gone away. King Brown Sumner, ex prawn cocktail, has had an uninterrupted career at the Beefeater chain since it opened 22 years ago. "It represents the Beefeater heartland," a spokeswoman said. "People want what they had before."

The drink rules that would empty Britain's boardrooms

James Cusick

The criteria used by a company doctor to brand a television executive a heavy drinker, killing a highly paid job offer, would deplete the boardrooms of British and US companies, a professor told the High Court yesterday.

Professor Neil McIntyre, of London's Royal Free hospital, was giving evidence on the second day of a civil action brought by executive Peter Baker against Dr Georges Kaye.

In 1991 Mr Baker, who now runs his own television distribution company, was on the verge of taking up the £45,000 post of sales director for the American network NBC in Europe when he was examined by Dr Kaye. Dr Kaye's report described Mr Baker, now 33, as "clinically corpulent" and a "reg-

ular heavy drinker". The job offer was withdrawn. Dr Kaye is being sued by Mr Baker for compensation.

During Dr Kaye's assessment, Mr Baker revealed he drank about 35 units of alcohol a week – equal to 17.5 pints of beer and seven units above the Government's recommended limit.

In court on Monday Mr Baker said that during a "bit of a spree" in Monte Carlo the week before his medical examination he had been celebrating his new job and drinking around a bottle of wine each day.

In court yesterday Dr Brian Gazzard, a consultant physician at the Chelsea and Westminster hospital in London, described asking people for their own alcohol intake as "a guessing game".

Dr Kaye told the judge, Robert Owen, QC, that he had not solely re-



Peter Baker: Suing over lost job

lied on Mr Baker's estimate. During his examination he said Mr Baker had a "lack of eye contact", poor deportment and demeanour, and there was a general "lack of forthcomingness".

He believed Mr Baker was underestimating his alcohol intake.

In 1991, expecting to move to the post at GE Technical Services (part of NBC), Mr Baker quit a £40,000 job at Guild TV.

Dr Michael Rehmar, the former medical director of GE, told the court that in recent years "alcohol at lunch began to be frowned upon". "People who could not make the change left the company," he said. He added that alcohol "interfered" with decisions and could have cost the company "hundreds of millions of dollars".

Dr Kaye's examination had involved blood and liver tests, the court was told. But Dr Anne Cockcroft, a consultant and senior lecturer in occupational medicine at the Royal Free, said it was "not good medicine" to rely on

blood tests of liver function as an indication of alcohol abuse. She said Mr Baker's sickness and absentee records should have been examined.

Professor McIntyre was also questioned on Dr Kaye's methodology. He described the descriptions of Mr Baker as "looking edgy" and being "clinically corpulent" as "rather pointless".

On Mr Baker's admission of consuming 35 units of alcohol a week Professor McIntyre said: "I would have thought that wouldn't alarm anyone."

Answering questions from Mr Baker's counsel, John Bowers, the professor said: "The boardrooms of British and American companies would be depleted" if similar judgements on the same level of alcohol intake were applied.

The hearing continues.

Big Mac ousts Coke as top brand

Roger Trapp

The golden arches of fast-food giant McDonald's have displaced the swirling Coca-Cola logo as the world's top brand, according to a new book published today.

Interbrand, the branding consultancy that compiled *The World's Greatest Brands*, also says that computer company IBM (11th out of 100) has lost ground to Microsoft (9th) and that Disney, the entertainment group, has leapt into third position. It adds that cereal maker Kellogg's (16th) and American Express (20th) have lost strength in recent years – "perhaps as a result of aggressive brand building by their competitors". Coca-Cola's traditional rival, Pepsi, is 17th.

The book – which includes 15 sector league tables as well as an overall top 100 – evaluates

Top Ten Brands

- 1 McDonald's
- 2 Coca-Cola
- 3 Disney
- 4 Kodak
- 5 Sony
- 6 Gillette
- 7 Mercedes Benz
- 8 Levi's
- 9 Microsoft
- 10 Marlboro

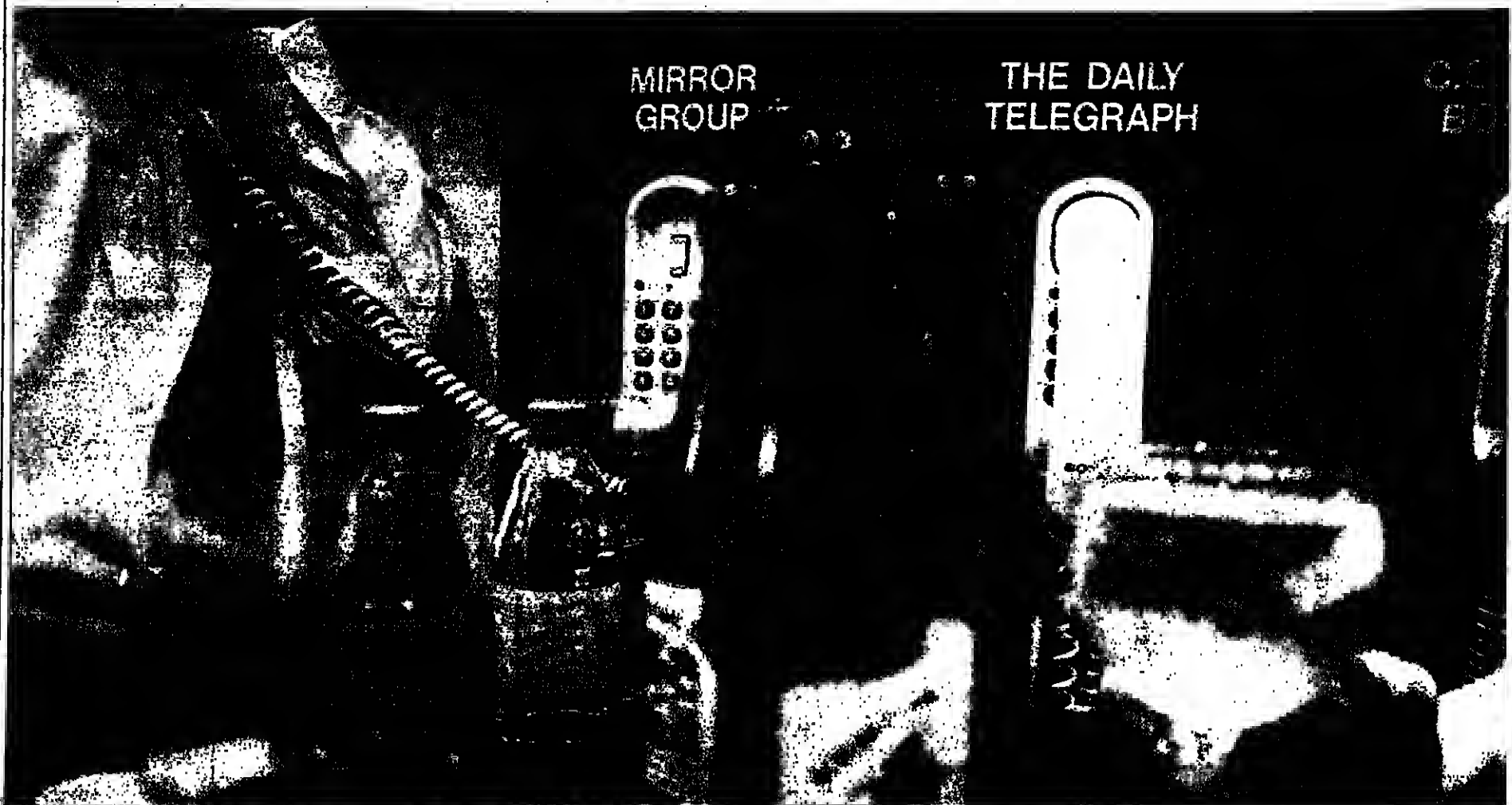
more than 350 household names according to four criteria: weight, or dominance in the market; length, or extension into other markets; breadth, or appeal across age, religion, gender and nationality; and depth, or customer commitment.

McDonald's only scored a few more points than Coca-Cola, but was felt to be stronger in weight, depth and length, while the soft drinks company fared better in breadth.

Tom Blackett, Interbrand's deputy chairman, said that the fast-food company had become the quintessential international brand. "The logos, interiors, concentration on families and classless appeal comprise a branding formula which is powerful across all national borders. Its success has not relied on huge advertising spend alone. It has developed a living, three-dimensional personality."

The Interbrand team points out that there have been so many changes since it last reviewed the market six years ago that even the more powerful brands – which also include such companies as Kodak, Mercedes Benz, Sony and Nike – have not been unscathed. But their enduring success is "a sign of the underlying quality they possess".

Other notables in the list include Heinz (30th), Harrods (41st), *Time* magazine (46th), the BBC (50th) and Virgin (91st).



Lunchtime drinking style: A bar in London's Canary Wharf frequented by journalists and bankers

Photograph: Andrew Buurman

US health police export new attitudes

Liz Hunt
Health Editor

Sympathy was running high yesterday for "clinically corpulent" Peter Baker.

The British pro- and anti-alcohol lobbies were united in their condemnation of the US broadcasting company NBC, which allegedly discriminated against Mr Baker, 34, on the grounds that his drinking habits – more than moderate but far from heavy – would interfere "with his crispness of thought".

From the British standpoint, it is clear that Mr Baker is not some sozzled left-over from the heady years of the 1980s, when the four hour liquid lunch

was the norm. Instead, it seems that Mr Baker's drinking is, well, about average for a man of his age in that profession.

Eric Appleby, director of Alcohol Concern, said: "If British companies took that [American] attitude then there would be a very thin workforce. The crucial question is when did he do his drinking?"

At the Portman Group, which represents the drink industry, Andrew Chevis said that a large number of people drank more than Mr Baker each day without any detrimental effect on their work.

Certainly there has been a sea-change in attitudes to drink and the workplace since the

1980s but this has less to do with the advance of the "health police" and the arrival of puritanical American companies, than with down-sizing and increasing workload. People are not drinking very much less in total – alcohol consumption has fallen just 2 to 3 per cent in the past 10 years – however, they are drinking differently. There is less alcohol during the day and less in the pub, but more at the weekend and at home.

The biggest change has occurred in those professions which were predominantly male, cushioned by expense accounts, and reliant on a certain amount of "entertaining". For example, journalists and

printers appear to have been fuelled by alcohol for much of Fleet Street's history. There were many candidates claiming to have inspired Peter Fallow, the drink-soaked British hack immortalised in Tom Wolf's chronicle of 1980s excess, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*.

Alan Watkins, political commentator of the *Independent on Sunday* has fond memories of the 1960s, when the clock struck 12pm and journalists would head for an aperitif and not return from lunch until 4.30pm. The view that alcohol and work don't mix has led to "a decline in journalism and more boring politicians", he opines. He recalls lunches with Dennis

Healey (a G&T to start), Tony Crossland and Iain Macleod (large dry martinis) followed by a bottle of wine and a glass or two of brandy before the politicians would depart for the Commons and speak brilliantly.

Nigel Lawson, former Chancellor and now diet guru, blames his one-time bottle and a half of wine a day consumption on his previous career as a journalist. However, he maintained that it had no effect on him other than weight gain.

That Mr Baker's consumption of 35 units of alcohol a week – just one more a day than the recommended limit for men – should alarm a US company should not really come as a sur-

prise. Attitudes to alcohol between the two countries are dramatically different: a third of the population in the US is teetotal compared with just 5 per cent or less here. A survey in 1994 found that while 19 per cent of American office workers liked to unwind with a drink, in the UK the figure was 55 per cent.

In his book, *Drink: An Informal Social History*, Andrew Barr wrote that "authoritative governments have more reason to be afraid of people when they think than when they drink". While American companies prefer the thinkers, here the UK there is still some sympathy for the drinkers too.

Research: Susan Emmett

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politics

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS
SCORING THE EXCHANGES

Tony Blair Blair's case was helped by Sir David Steel, but in fact he needed little support. He kept it short and sweet. While the soundbites were there ("Vote Tory for no right to a holiday"), so was everything else.

John Major

He couldn't or wouldn't answer Blair's questions, unfortunately on a day when the Opposition leader's attacks were particularly on-target.

THEMES OF THE DAY
Blair's sale of Hawk aircraft to Australia (Nick Hawkins, C. Blackpool, S)
The Winston tax (Peter Luff, C. Worcester)
Free vote on gun control (Terry Rooney, Lab. Bradford N)
Recent Tory council by-election (Richard Alexander, C. Newark)

BLAIR'S ATTACK
Blair's first question: what is wrong with a law that leaves employees free to work long hours but forbids compelling them to do so? Major's reply summed up the ensuing argument: "I think the Rt Hon Gentleman yet again is in danger of missing the point. Unemployment is falling here as we become more competitive. This directive would reverse that trend."

GOOD DAY **...BAD DAY**

SIR DAVID STEEL

Sir David Steel (L. Dem. Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale). Liberal members are making a habit of asking questions which back up Blair's. Paddy Ashdown did it last Tuesday; yesterday, Steel pointed out that in July 1992 Employment Secretary Cillian Sheehan assured the House that the Government had secured all its key objectives on the 48-hour week.

LUCY - David Blunkett's dog

It was the rowdiest question time for several months. Even the Speaker yelled. ("Stop shouting and barking for goodness' sake"). Lucy takes it well, only occasionally raising her head and looking despairingly about. Surely she should be spared such poor human company.

THE UNANSWERED QUESTION
Unanswered question: Rooney. "Could the Prime Minister tell the House why he favours having a free vote on caring but not on gun control?" "I have to say to him that I do not agree with him on that" was about as far as Major was prepared to go.

THE CREEP OF THE DAY
Alexander. After citing one recent council by-election victory, he went on to compliment Mr Major on the wonderful state of the party which he leads, and asked the Speaker: "Can I put it to him... that if we continue with sensible policies, my Rt Hon Friend is on course for a record fifth Conservative victory?"
Compiled by Ben Summers

Howard doubles gun-ban cash offer to £100m

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

The Home Secretary, Michael Howard, last night doubled the compensation for the shooting lobby in a last-ditch attempt to head off a right wing Tory backbench revolt over the ban on handguns.

But the new estimated figure of around £100m failed to buy off those who demanded higher compensation for businesses faced with bankruptcy. A group of about 30 Tory MPs were threatening to abstain last night on the second reading of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill which proposes a ban on all handguns above .22 calibre weapons in the wake of the Dunblane massacre in which 16 children and a teacher were killed last March.

The Home Secretary announced that in addition to around £150 per gun, enthusiasts who will be forced to surrender their weapons under the Government Bill will be entitled to compensation for accessories, including holsters, gloves and reloading equipment.

Officials estimated that it would add "tens of millions of pounds" to the total bill for compensation which was earlier put at £25-£50m. The concession was secured after a meeting between the Home Secretary and a lobby of shooting representatives, led by former minister Sir Jerry Wiggin.

Sir Jerry was among a group of eight Tory MPs led by former Cabinet minister John Biffen who tabled a motion attacking the Government for going beyond the Cullen report by supporting an almost total ban on handguns. A cross-party group, including Labour MPs Austin Mitchell and Frank Cook, tabled a rival motion calling on the report to be implemented.

The increased compensation was intended to stop a split in the Tory ranks before the crucial vote next Monday on a move by Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National Party and Tory MPs led by David Mellor to impose a total ban.

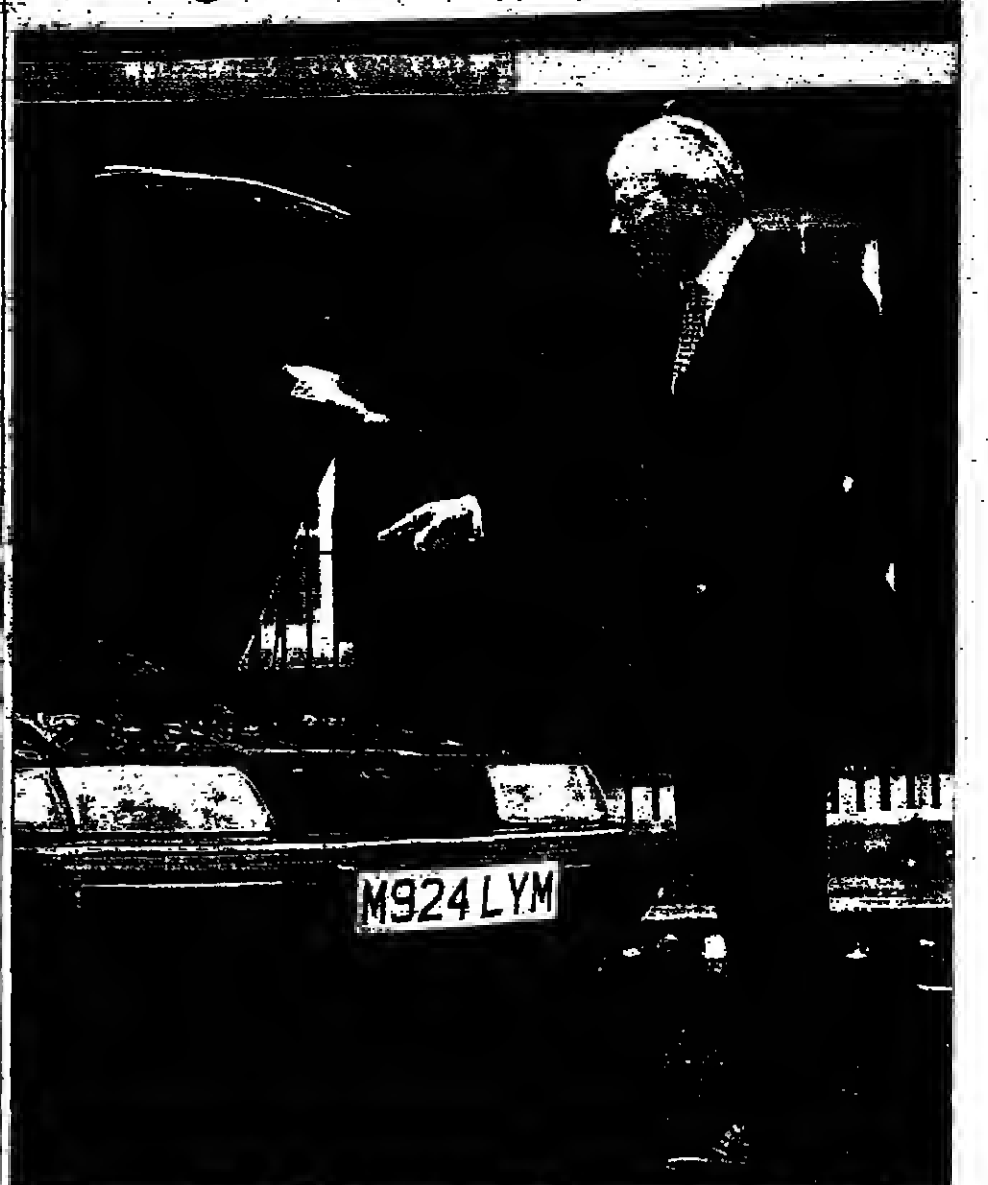
But the offer of higher compensation failed to quell the demands for more money by senior Tory MPs for gun clubs, gun shops and ammunition manufacturers whose businesses will be hit. Sir Terence Higgins, a former Treasury minister, led the backbench calls for higher compensation. Welcoming the concession by Mr Howard, Sir Terence said: "The fact it has

been necessary reflects the rush with which the legislation has been brought forward. It is clear that whatever view one may take about complete bans or revised bans, it would be grossly unjust for people who have businesses who will receive no revenue and are likely to go bankrupt."

The crunch vote will come next Monday, when a cross-party amendment will be pressed to extend the Bill to a total ban on all handguns. The Ulster Unionists are expected to abstain, securing a victory for the Government on the Bill as drafted. Exemptions to the ban will include trophies of war acquired before 1946, flare pistols, starting pistols, and guns used to despatch animals humanely by veterinary surgeons, hunt servants and those working in slaughterhouses.

The Snowdrop campaign, supported by families of the victims of the Dunblane massacre, lobbied MPs to reinforce their call for a free vote on the issue. They believe that without a whip behind the Government's formula, there would be a Commons majority for a total ban. Members of the campaign will be meeting the Ulster Unionist leaders tomorrow urging them to support the total ban.

More gas, less guzzle for Major



Machinery of state: John Major pointing out a feature on the engine of a gas-powered Rover 527, presented to him by British Gas in Downing Street yesterday. The car, which can run on gas or petrol at the flick of a switch, will join the government car pool.

Unionists wooed to avert defeat on BSE

Colin Brown

Two Cabinet ministers yesterday held a private meeting with the Commons with Ulster Unionist leaders in an attempt to avert a government defeat in tonight's vote on the BSE crisis.

The Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble and his party whip Willie Ross met Roger Freeman, the Cabinet minister with responsibility for coordinating action on the beef crisis. It is understood that they then held a short meeting at Westminster with Douglas Hogg, Minister of Agriculture.

The Government is facing a Labour attack on its handling of the beef negotiations and the vote could be close, with the Government's majority down to one.

It will be an early test of the Ulster Unionists' willingness to bail out the Government in the

run-up

to the general election. The Ulster Unionists are working on a compromise package which could allow the ban on beef exports to be lifted for Northern Ireland before the rest of the United Kingdom.

But Scottish beef farmers would be infuriated if the ban was lifted for the province while still applying to them.

The European agriculture commissioner, Franz Fischler, is expecting a response from Mr Hogg at an agriculture ministers' council on Monday.

Sources close to Mr Hogg last night hinted that an early breakthrough was unlikely, and it could be another month before British ministers have worked out a plan for a selective cull, crucial in getting the

ban lifted. Whitehall sources said that the beef industry in Northern Ireland was well placed to go ahead with a selective cull, because cattle are routinely tagged to stop cross-border smuggling. The sea barrier between the province and the mainland was a further factor, which European ministers weighed in its favour in considering lifting the ban.

But the European ministers are also reported to be sceptical about lifting the ban on Scottish beef exports because they fear the cattle could come from England.

Gavin Strang, shadow agriculture minister, will attack the Prime Minister and Mr Hogg for mishandling the negotiations and for broken promises over lifting the ban.

In spite of their threats of non-cooperation with Europe, the ban remains and is unlikely to be lifted before 2002.



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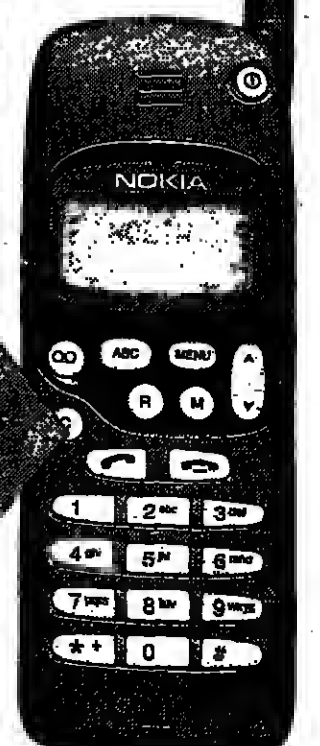
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Unions get ready for cut in working hours

Barrie Clement,
Michael Harrison and
Chris Godsmark

Britain's largest union yesterday began drawing up a target list of workers who should benefit most from the working time directive while business leaders urged the Government to take full advantage of the exemptions.

The public service union Unison yesterday declared that senior local government officials, residential social workers, ambulance and police support staff would be among the workers who should soon see a reduction in their working hours below 48 hours week.

The thousands of part-time workers who work in the public sector should benefit from an entitlement to three weeks' paid holiday, rising to four weeks in 1999, Rodney Bickerstaffe, general secretary of Unison, said that cleaners, dinner ladies and

a telephone "hot line" to help businesses understand the directive. It has also prepared special information packs for companies to explain how they can implement the measures.

The Confederation of British Industry said it was disappointed at the ruling but urged the Government to take full advantage of the exemptions and begin consultation with business on implementation of the directive.

Speaking at its conference in Harrogate, Adam Turner, the CBI's director-general, described the directive as "legislation at its worst - detailed and prescriptive regulations followed by extensive caveats and exemptions". The CBI said it was vital that the Government implemented options that would allow individual employees to work 48 hours if they wished and permit employers to average the 48-hour week over 12 months.

The British Chambers of Commerce said that two-thirds of small businesses opposed a 48-hour week. According to a BCC survey, eight in ten firms felt it would impinge on their flexibility, while 43 per cent said it would increase administration costs. But the survey also showed that 91 per cent of those working more than 48 hours were doing so voluntarily. Such arrangements can stay in place.

Jan Peters, deputy director-general, said small firms would find it hardest to cope: "They haven't got the resources to defend themselves if they are taken to court."

Chris Haskins, chairman of Northern Foods, one of the biggest food groups and a well-known Labour supporter, was less concerned. "It's much ado about nothing. We already have health and safety legislation over pilots and lorry drivers to prevent people working excessive hours," he argued.

Leading article, page 13

people who work during term times at schools would be among those targeted. He added: "We will be vigilant in making sure that the directive is implemented properly and on time. And we will take legal action against employers and the Government if they fail."

John Edmonds, leader of the GMB general union, said his organisation had set aside £250,000 for litigation against employers if necessary. "We want to make sure the Government doesn't try any third-form public schoolboy tricks to avoid implementing the law. We will also pursue with vigour any employer who jeopardises their workers by forcing them to work long hours."

In what might be regarded as a piece of mischief, the MSF technical and white-collar union announced that it would set up



A portion of time off: Dinner ladies could be among the first public service staff to benefit from the Working Time Directive's provisions on holidays, which stipulate that employees must be given a minimum of three weeks' paid holiday a year. For others, the hours limit will bring the greatest benefits. Photograph: Brian Hams

Battle that Britain was expecting to lose

Sarah Helm
Brussels

The number of hours worked each week can rightly be thought to affect the health and safety of workers.

It was this, short, and, some would say, self-evident, assertion from the European Court of Justice, which yesterday spelt defeat for Britain in the European Court, propelling the Government into another full-scale conflict with Europe.

During the two years since it launched its legal challenge to the working hours directive, Britain has built its entire case around the claim that workers' health and safety is unconnected

to the hours they work. British lawyers told the court that the chance to take regular breaks, and enjoy paid annual leave does not affect workers' well-being; health and safety at work was purely about ensuring they were not exposed to obvious risks such as dangerous equipment.

Using this argument Britain went on to claim, therefore, that other member states had no right to pass the working time directive under article 118a of the Treaty of Rome, which governs health and safety.

Throughout the legal wrangle, senior government officials have scarcely been able to hide their uneasiness about the weakness of this legal case, and

the Government clearly anticipated yesterday's defeat.

However, the court challenge was deemed necessary if the Government was to pursue its political imperative of blocking further legislation under article 118a. Article 118a is highly contentious for Britain because it is governed by qualified majority voting, and therefore gives Britain no power of veto.

In its case before the court, therefore, Britain argued that the working hours directive

should have been brought in under different treaty articles, where the veto could have been used. Lately, the Government has even tried to argue that the directive should have been brought in under the social chapter - from which Britain has an "opt-out" - even though the "opt-out" was not thought of at the time the directive was proposed.

The tersely argued 19-page court judgment, presented in Luxembourg, roundly rejected

the Government's case on all fronts, conceding only that there was no reason for Sunday to be a preferred day off.

The judges said: "There is nothing in the wording of Article 118a to indicate that the concepts of 'working environment', 'safety' and 'health' ... should be interpreted restrictively." The interpretation could rightly embrace "all factors, physical or otherwise, capable of affecting the health and safety of the working in his work-

ing environment, including, in particular, certain aspects of organisation of working time".

Although the court accepted that the directive could cost money and have an effect on employment, the protection of health and safety was a valid community objective. And, giving member states and the EC a tacit green-light to consider new social legislation, the court said that hours worked should not be decided "by purely economic considerations".

As the politicians wrangle, companies get on with it

Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

Despite the Government's campaign against the working time directive, private sector companies have already started talks with unions on how the law will apply.

The first to reach an agreement on behalf of 1,100 firms employing 20,000 people was the Heating and Ventilating Contractors' Association, which has secured a deal allowing them maximum flexibility over the 48-hour week.

The MSF, white collar and technical union has agreed that companies can take advantage of "derogations" from the strict letter of the directive so that working time is averaged out over 12 months rather than the stipulated four months.

Peter Rimmer, head of employment affairs at the association, said his organisation had carried out a detailed review of the law some months ago and had prepared the way for yesterday's judgment by the European Court. The deal would give the sector considerable freedom and was a "pragmatic" approach to the directive.

"We had to recognise that when the Advocate General ruled against the Government's appeal earlier this year, there was a degree of inevitability about the whole issue."

Unions at a Japanese-owned motor component company, Denso Marston, are expecting to sign an accord incorporating the directive into their collective agreement. The company employs 2,000 workers at plants at Leeds, Shipley and Telford.

Elsewhere the printing industry has already begun discussions with the GPMU union on how companies will be able to cope with the massive fluctuations in demand experienced by the sector while still adhering to the directive. The pre-Christmas period, for instance, means that many employees are working overtime in greetings card companies with some exceeding the 48-hour limit.

The British Printing Industries Federation opposes the directive in principle, but has arranged a joint seminar with the union in order to come to terms with it.

Andrew Brown, employment affairs director at the federation, said: "We don't like the directive, it is badly worded and will impede our ability to give customer service, but the ruling is

the ruling." He pointed out that any manufacturing industry which was subject to fluctuations in demand would need to examine how the law would affect them and he urged the Government to produce a consultative document as soon as possible.

Preliminary talks have also been held at British Steel, which employs 43,000 workers in the United Kingdom. More will follow, a spokesman said. The privatised company is concerned in particular on how the rules on night working and shifts would affect production.

Keith Brookman, general secretary of the ISTC steel union, said his organisation was keen to offer the company flexibility but was also concerned to introduce changes which would benefit members.

Long days can damage your health, say scientists

Jojo Moyes

As the Government yesterday claimed that the European Union had enforced the 48-hour week through the "back door" of health and safety regulations, two scientists who had submitted evidence to the European Court said that the recommendation was justified.

Professor Simon Folkard of Swansea University, who was asked to present a medical case to the court, compared it to the effect of alcohol on driving. "We can't put our hands on our hearts and say that's the perfect limit but we can say there's a need for limits," he said yesterday.

"One of the things my group is trying to do is establish a link between disturbed sleep at one end and increased cardiovascular risk at the other. There is some evidence that disturbed

sleep results in chronic fatigue, which results in psychological problems, which results in gastrointestinal problems, which may result in cardiovascular problems."

He added that a finer examination of the effects of long working hours showed an "exponential function", in that working one hour over 40 may have very little impact on a worker, whereas one hour added onto a 60 hour week could have a "massive effect".

"The evidence suggests that if people work excessive hours they have health and safety problems. Forty-eight hours seems a very reasonable limit to me," Prof Folkard said.

Professor Malcolm Harrington of Birmingham University was asked by the then Department of Employment to review the existing evidence on whether the Working Time Di-

rective could be based on health and safety issues.

Although he concluded that it was "difficult" to fix an exact number of hours, as there was no specific scientific evidence to back it, he said that a 48 hour limit was not unreasonable - and that the figure should be "certainly not much higher".

"If you look at more than 56 hours, there is a lot of evidence that [that] would be detrimental. If policy makers then say 48 hours it doesn't bother me."

"I think it comes down to the fact that if you want to interpret science and give it to a policy maker you would have difficulty disputing the justification for fixing numbers," he said.

While he could see no justification for advocating a specific length of holiday, working breaks, or length between shifts, Professor Harrington, who claims his position on the issue,

has been widely misrepresented, believes setting a 48 hour week is about "the bottom line - protecting those who can't protect themselves".

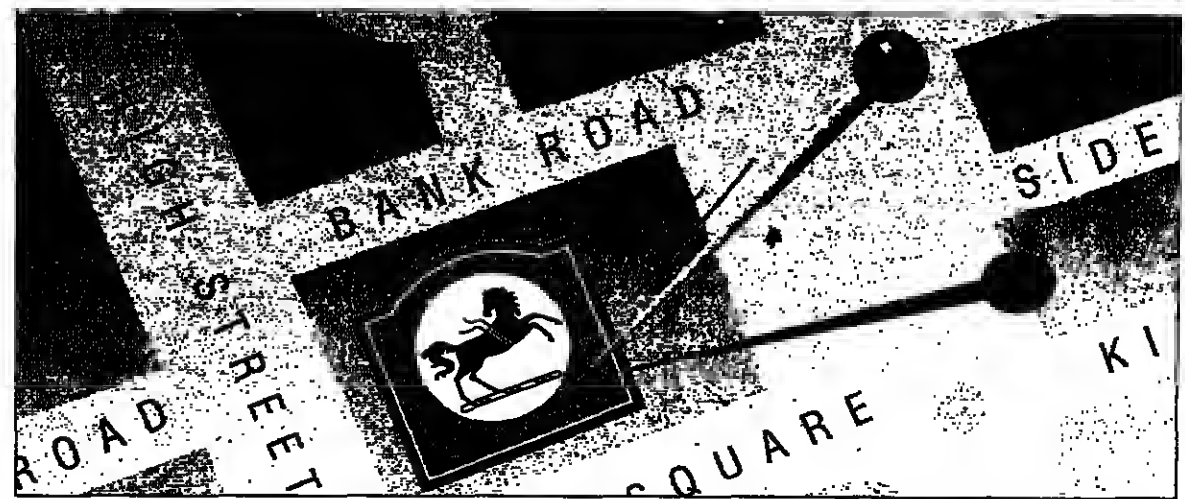
"I happen to believe, now looking at the evidence, that the hours of the working directive can be justified as a health and safety measure."

He is currently researching the effects of long working hours on white collar workers and their companies.

Meanwhile, Chris Cardell, a business stress management consultant, believes that despite being widely criticised by business leaders, the implementation of a 48 hour week, would be a "blessing in disguise" for British firms.

He said absences from work through stress and stress-related illnesses cost UK businesses £7 billion a year, and the new law could save money.

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news

Bah, humbug! Newley plans a Dickens of a musical



What the Dickens: Anthony Newley in his dressing-room at the Dominion Theatre, London, preparing for yesterday's opening of the musical Scrooge Photograph: Laurie Lewis

Deadly dog worm spreads across Britain

Nicholas Schoon
Environment Correspondent

A lethal worm disease appears to be spreading among foxes and dogs in Britain. The parasite has been found in foxes for the first time, indicating that they are a reservoir of infection.

Both the young forms of the nematode worm, *Angiostrongylus vasorum*, and the adult damage the heart, blood vessels and lungs and cause internal bleeding. The disease can be successfully treated if diagnosed early.

"It seems that it is well and

truly established among dogs and foxes, and there are indications that it is spreading," said Vic Simpson, the Cornwall-based Ministry of Agriculture vet who discovered the parasite in foxes.

He and colleagues have observed cases spreading across a

larger and larger area of the South-east. At first, 15 years ago, dogs were becoming infected in an area near Redruth only one mile across. Now it is about 25 miles across, with around a dozen cases a year. There is a similar focus of infection in south Wales, near Swansea, and cases have

been reported among dogs in the South-east.

As part of its complex and unpleasant life cycle, the nematode also parasitises frogs and two species of slugs which thrive in the warm, damp climate of Cornwall.

These slugs have been observed to feed on dog faeces - and dogs occasionally eat slugs, which is how the disease spreads among pets. Foxes, too, are avid eaters of slugs, especially when young, and they also hunt frogs.

Last year a young male fox was found wandering aimlessly in the Cornish village of Mousehole. It failed to recover and was put down, and when Mr Simpson examined it he found large numbers of the parasite in its lungs, heart and blood vessels. Mousehole is

some 20 miles from the area where dogs are infected.

Until recently the disease has never been observed among British foxes, although it has been found in several other European countries.

Mr Simpson has subsequently found the parasite in four out of a further eleven dead foxes he examined at the ministry's Veterinary Investigation Unit in Truro. Three of these animals also had severe mange, which has become much more common in foxes lately. His findings are reported in a recent edition of the *Veterinary Record*.

Mr Simpson says the mange and worm infections could indicate that foxes' defence systems against disease have been lowered by stress caused by their high population density.

Strikes that could be end of the world

Charles Arthur
Editor

The Government is considering the ultimate sanction against strikes: nuclear weapons. However, postal and underground workers are safe for the moment. The strikes would be those from asteroids or meteors which could cause widespread destruction - or even destroy civilisation.

In a meeting yesterday with government officials, scientists set out the risks to the Earth from rogue asteroids, and described possible courses of defensive action.

Though this is one aspect of strike policy on which the political manifestos are silent, there is growing consensus among astronomers that rocket-launched nuclear weapons may be the best - and perhaps only - way to avoid a global cataclysm.

There are an estimated 100,000 objects larger than a kilometre across which could come closer than Mars and so pose a threat to the Earth - though scientists admit that the figure could be much larger.

"You either want to pulverise it, so that you have much smaller objects which are burnt up in the atmosphere, or divert its path," said David Hughes, reader in astronomy, at Sheffield University. "Any old explosive will do. And when you're launching rockets, you want the most efficient explosive load you can pack in."

Duncan Steel, an astronomer at the University of Adelaide, in Australia, who runs a project called Spaceguard, which logs any dangerous asteroids, said: "They are a significant hazard. But we shouldn't be building rockets

yet. What we should do is plot the orbits of those which could threaten us and predict when they would strike. Then you have enough warning to do something about it."

A spokeswoman for the Department of Trade and Industry said that a nuclear strike against an asteroid "would need international co-operation before such action could be considered. It's being treated as a hypothesis."

The Earth is certainly at risk from a future asteroid impact. The planet has been hit repeatedly by celestial bodies of various sizes, sometimes with drastic results. About 65 million years ago, an 180-kilometre-wide asteroid travelling at 20,000mph struck near to Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula - causing the death of the dinosaurs.

In June 1908, an asteroid less than 100 metres wide crashed into the atmosphere above Tunguska, Siberia, with the force of a 15-megaton bomb and flattened trees across hundreds of square kilometres.

And sometime in the next million years, scientists have calculated, the 22-kilometre asteroid Eros, presently in the vicinity of Mars, will fall towards the Earth.

In June, an internal civil service report advised the Ministry of Defence to employ three people to sift through the current data on the threat of a cosmic impact.

But Mr Hughes thought the risks of a devastating collision were low.

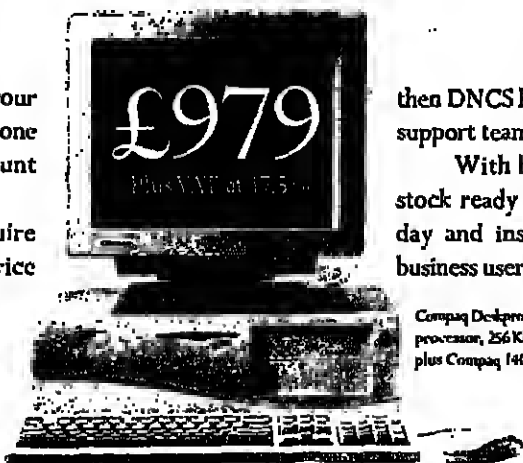
"Life has survived. We are here. These asteroids have been hitting the Earth continually since its origin, the rate of asteroidal impact has been going down since its origin, and life has survived," he said.



The scene after an asteroid crashed into the atmosphere above Siberia in 1908 Photograph: Science Photo Library

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Bishop urges tax boost for family values

Andrew Brown
Religious Affairs Correspondent

An evangelical bishop has called for tax allowances for families which would encourage parents to stay at home.

Speaking at the Evangelical Alliance in Bournemouth yesterday, the Bishop of Hull, the Rt Rev James Jones, told the 3000 delegates that the present tax regime penalised parents.

"Politicians must match their rhetoric about the family with policies that actually strengthen the family. It is clear that the taxation system has been one of the major factors to drive both parents from home to the detriment of their children," he said.

The bishop also suggested that child benefit be doubled for couples who were prepared to go to parenting courses. "To plough millions of pounds, as we do, into consequences of bad parenting, instead of investing in good parents is like deliberately overlooking a vaccine in favour of treating an epidemic," he said.

However, he warned his audience against denouncing unchristian sexual morality, rather than trying to change it by persuasion and example. He compared British evangelicals today to the missionaries to Africa in the last century who were confronted with the problem of polygamy.

"The least effective missionaries were those who insisted that potential converts first turn from their many marriages... We witness many relationships that are less than the ideal, yet



Good News: Evangelical delegates pray for fair media coverage of their annual conference in Bournemouth yesterday

Photograph: Tom Pilsten

recognise that paradoxically there are virtues of security and friendship within them."

His speech marks a considerable growth in self-confidence among evangelicals, who hope that they are poised to begin a transformation of society similar to that achieved by their Victorian forebears.

The 3,000 leaders meeting in Bournemouth this week believe they represent nearly half of Britain's Protestants, and will soon represent the majority. A poll of their churches has just showed that support for social action and poverty relief is as strong as that for upholding traditional sexual morality and protesting against abortion.

"Victorian evangelicals remoralised society after the Industrial Revolution. God is calling us to remoralise this society as it enters the post-industrial revolution," said the

Rev Clive Calver, director general of the Evangelical Alliance yesterday.

The evangelical agenda of conservatism around the family but radicalism towards the

problems of the poor is emerging clearly both from this conference and from the recent speeches of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey. Yesterday Dr Carey told an

audience of local authority chief executives: "Parenting should surely be seen as a fundamentally important calling and duty requiring the most careful preparation, not least at school,

and the strong support of the wider society."

But he also warned against excluding children from society and from schools: "I hold to firm discipline allied to caring teach-

ing. Nevertheless, children who are excluded from school for whatever reason are a problem for us all because we know how strong is the correlation between school exclusion and a subsequent career of delinquency and crime.

"Excluded and marginalised people, especially frustrated young males, have a way of hitting back in spectacular fashion. Exclusion as a tactic, without a strongly resourced strategy for helping these youngsters back along the road of self-respect and reintegration in society, would surely prove disastrous."

He praised the recent Roman Catholic bishop's document *The Common Good*, which has been widely seen as an exhortation to vote against the Conservative Government. "The gap between the poorest and richer parts of our society has increased, even if there is a great deal of mobility between the two. Only those determined to ignore the evidence will deny that there are significant sections of our society living in circumstances which should not be tolerated," Dr Carey said.

DAILY POEM

If it was a train only, it wasn't
at this small station

By Thomas McCarthy

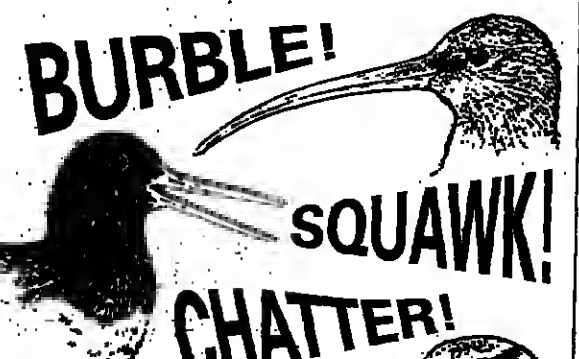
It was one of those five afternoons
in Paradise. A bone-dry day,
netles and parsley on the embankment.
A train pulled out of Cappoquin station.

The earth moved, and the train
like an elephant spitting through the trees
beat me from the ticket office. Was it
Jackie Greene, the phlegmatic clerk,

who flagged it back again?
I can't remember. But I recall my foot
on the grey, moulded pedal-step
and the feel of a master's hand at my back

pushing me on. The August afternoon
carried me drunk to Dungarvan.
Even then I knew I'd used one day
out of the four or five in childhood.

Peter Jay's Anvil Press has been publishing poetry in and around Greenwich for 28 years. Its homegrown talent includes Carol Ann Duffy, Heather Buck, Alice Oswald, Peter Levi and James Harpur and, in translation, Paul Celan, Vasko Popa and the Nobel Prize winner George Sefaris. This autumn a new and ambitious list is launched. There are new collections by Thomas McCarthy, James Harpur and Ruth Sittcock, and the publication of Peter Dale's one-volume modern English *terza rima* version of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* - more than 10 years in the making.



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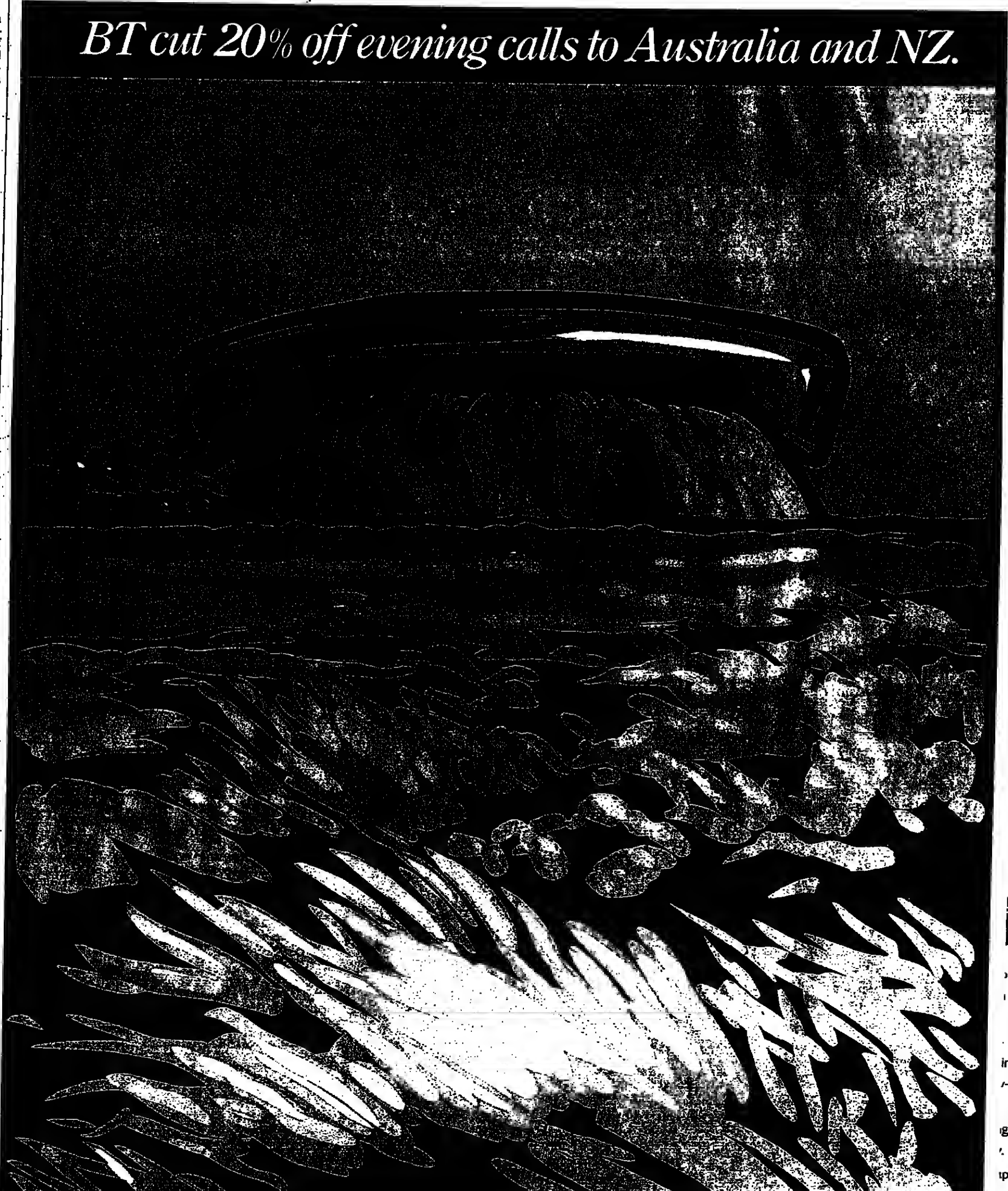
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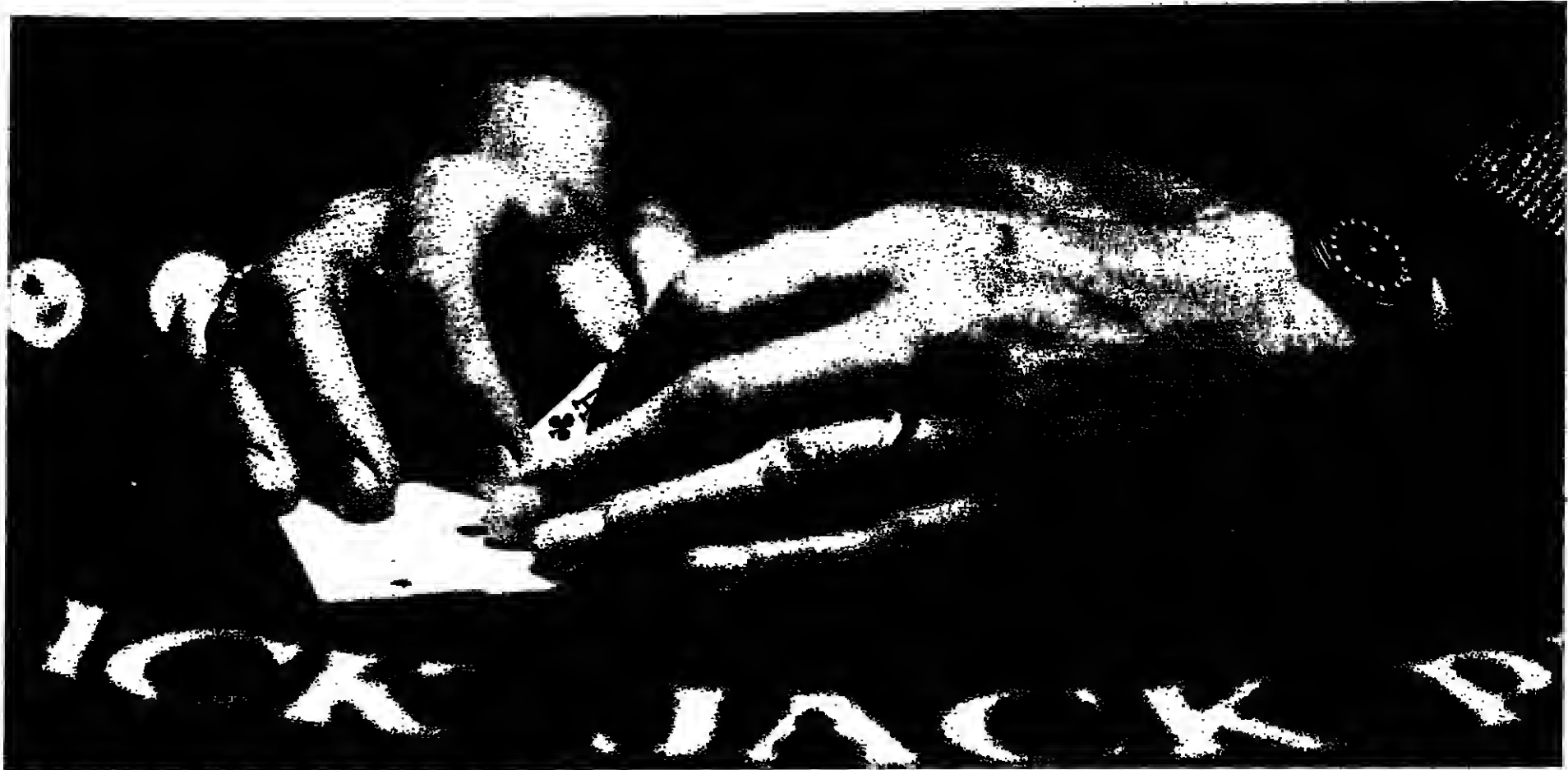


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Put away the whist and rummy: casinos are coming to Eastbourne, Bath and Harrogate



High stakes: A big expansion in gambling is planned by the Home Office, with two 'Las Vegas' style gaming centres likely to develop in England

Photograph: John Voos

Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

The establishment of two new "Las Vegas" style gaming centres – in the north of England and in London – came a step closer yesterday as the Home Office proposed allowing at least 21 new casinos.

Among the potential gaming zones are the spa town of Bath, the retirement mecca of Eastbourne and the cathedral cities of Exeter and York. The Home Office also plans to allow

slot machines with unlimited stakes and pay-outs, similar to the ones in the United States that spew out buckets of dollars. At present the jackpot limit is £250.

But despite admitting that the new casinos could lead to more gambling addicts, the Government is refusing to fund a new national group to help those affected.

The new measures are part of the Home Office's gaming deregulation proposals, which include the promotion

and expansion of casinos. The Home Office published a consultation paper on the issue in February, but since then a number of local authorities have expressed a desire to add casinos to their list of tourist attractions.

Several councils in the Docklands area of east London, which includes the Canary Wharf development, have asked to be included. If they obtained permission many gaming houses could be built by the Thames. Similarly,

Harrogate and York, which have been added to the proposed "permitted area" list for casinos, could link up with Leeds to form a northern gambling triangle.

Seven towns which cater for more than 5,000 conference delegates have been added to the Home Office's original list of potential sites.

The additional conference-town locations are Bath, Eastbourne, Exeter, Harrogate, Norwich, Telford, and York. There are already proposals

for Gloucester, Oxford, Hastings, Ipswich, Swindon, Dartford, Redbridge, Slough, Folkestone, Morecambe and Weymouth. The local authorities in Croydon and Peterborough, which were also on the original list, have lodged objections with the Home Office, which is now re-considering those sites.

Announcing the proposals yesterday, Timothy Kirkhope, the Home Office minister, insisted that the Government did not want to emulate Las Vegas

or Atlantic City, where dozens of casinos are crammed together to form long gambling strips. "We don't think that approach would work and we are not going to encourage it," he said.

Proposals for the existing 119 casinos in England and Wales made by the Home Office include allowing the owners to advertise their facilities in regional newspapers and magazines and allowing casinos to have up to three slot machines per gaming table. That

would let the largest casino in London have 100. It is also proposed that members of a casino could have access to other clubs in the same group and that membership could be arranged by post.

The Home Office will carry out further consultation up to the end of January. Mr Kirkhope said it was "conceivable" that the measures could be in place before a May general election, but that seems unlikely. Mr Kirkhope confirmed that the Government will not provide

any new money to fund groups that help gambling addicts. A charity called the National Association for Gambling Care, Educational Resources and Training hopes to open in a few months in response to the rising number of gambling-related problems. Paul Bellringer, a founder of the organisation, said: "With the opening up of gambling in this country there are more people who have got into problems and the need for treatment and training is greater than ever before."

Russia's lawless caviar merchants dish the sturgeon

Nicholas Schoon
Environment Correspondent

The days of caviar and the sturgeon fish which produces it could be numbered because of greed and the collapse of authority in Russia and other former Soviet nations, according to investigators into illegal wildlife trading.

A report for Traffic, which monitors and seeks to uncover traders in endangered species, says lawlessness prevails along much of the shores of the Caspian Sea, stronghold of the sturgeon whose unfertilised eggs make caviar.

Quotas and fishing techniques used to conserve the fish, which can take up to 25 years to mature, have largely disappeared.

According to official figures, the legitimate catch in the Caspian fell by three-quarters between 1984 and 1994. Yet, says the report published today, exports appeared to be unaffected while the amount of effort put into fishing increased. It concludes that at least 50 per cent of the catch is illegal.

Tom De Meulenaer, director of Traffic in Europe, said: "Immediate measures to seriously control the whole industry, from fisheries to the consumer, are required if the industry and sturgeon are to survive."

There are 25 species of sturgeon, two of which are believed to be particularly endangered. But 90 per cent of the world's catch and caviar comes from three species found in the Caspian Sea – the beluga, the Russian and the stellate. The Beluga can grow up to 20ft long. The main exporters are

Russia and Iran and the biggest single importing bloc is the European Union. Britain takes about 30 tons of caviar a year, making it the continent's third biggest consumer after Germany and France. In Britain, caviar can be bought only from up-market department stores and specialist outlets. A 30-gram jar costs about £30.

The report puts the blame for poor fisheries control and smuggling on Russia and two of its neighbouring republics, Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan. It says that some caviar coming into

Europe has been suspiciously cheap, indicating that it has been smuggled or that its origins are illicit. But fishing is not alone in creating the plight of the sturgeon, which evolved 250 million years ago – before the dinosaurs. Damming of its spawning grounds, damage and diversion of waterways and pollution have added to the threats. Tumours and other disorders have been found in adult fish, while analysis of caviar samples on sale in Britain revealed very low traces of toxic organochlorine compounds such as DDT and PCBs.

But fishing is by far the main culprit and the report, endorsed by the World Wide Fund for Nature, calls for the rapid restoration of proper controls on the fishery.

The report says trawling for sturgeon, once outlawed as a conservation measure, has resumed. The illegal fishing is no secret – in 1994 Russian authorities said they had detained more than 1,000 poachers, confiscated more than 100 tons of sturgeon and five tons of caviar,

and shut seven illegal caviar processing plants. Only one species of sturgeon, the common, occasionally visits the seas around Britain. A few are caught off our coast each year.

John Gummer, Secretary of State for the Environment, flew to Argentina last night for international treaty negotiations on conserving wildlife. However, the Government was under fire for neglecting endangered sea birds on the mid-Atlantic island of Ascension. A plague of feral rats and cats, introduced by man, has severely depleted their numbers.

Experts have devised a £1.5m plan for eradicating the pests, which eat eggs and nestlings on the UK dependent territory. But the Government has only offered to cover 2 per cent of the cost.

A spokesman for UK conservation charities, including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, said they were happy to pay a large share but "the bottom line is that we expect a serious contribution from the Government".



The big haul: The sturgeon has brought rich rewards for fishermen round the Caspian Sea. That could soon change

Pupils take to 'work' courses

Judith Judd
Education Editor

All 14-year-olds should be able to study new work-related qualifications in school within two years, Gillian Shephard the Secretary of State for Education, announced yesterday.

She spoke as an inspectors' report showed that new qualifications in health and social care, business and manufacturing are motivating students.

Ministers hope the courses, which are being offered as an alternative to GCSE, will attract pupils bored by academic study. This year information technology, leisure and tourism and art and design have been added. Next year, engineering will come on stream.

The inspectors investigated 115 schools piloting the courses (part 1 GNVQs) for 5,500 14- and 15-year-olds and found that standards were highest in business and lowest in manufacturing. They said teachers needed to be brought up to date in manufacturing.

Ministers have begun to address the report's criticisms that the assessment is too cumbersome and complicated and that teachers do not understand how to mark the work. Students of all abilities were attracted to the courses, though there were proportionately fewer of the most and least able.

Doug McAvoy, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said his survey showed teachers had a positive attitude to the qualification but a quarter of schools felt that it was under-funded.

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صكزا من الاصل

Human error blamed for air crash

Confusion over instructions

CHRISTOPHER BELLAMY
Defence Correspondent

The two aircraft which crashed west of Delhi last night, one landing and one taking off, were close to the airport, and under tight air traffic control from the ground and visible on radar.

It looks as if either the controllers made a catastrophic mistake, or one of the aircraft - which were in the most vulnerable phases of their flight, taking off or landing - did not do as it was told or misunderstood instructions.

Two years ago, an Uzbek aircraft crashed at Delhi after confusion caused by language difficulties, and it may be that communication difficulties may again have been the problem.

Whatever the cause, the crash will renew concern about the risk of mid-air collisions close to airports in Britain, where there have been a number of "near misses" which could have killed hundreds of people. The Indian crash will be the subject of minute investigation, but a technical cause looks unlikely. Precise details, like the height at which the aircraft were flying when they collided, were not initially available.

"Under air traffic control they are told what to do. Provided they did what they are told to do, it was an air traffic control error," said David Rider, editor of *Jane's Air Traffic Control*. "Otherwise, it was pilot error - if an aircraft was told to turn right and turned left, for example."

The Saudi Boeing 747 airliner taking off from New Delhi's Indira Gandhi airport collided with a Tupolev-154 of Kazakhstan Airlines close to the ground, according to initial eyewitness reports which spoke of "fireballs".

A report by the Press Trust of India (PTI) cited officials of the Civil Aviation Directorate as saying the Saudi plane, SV 763, had been cleared to climb to 14,000 feet and the Kazakh airliner, KZA 1907, had been cleared to descend to 15,000 feet on the same route. Such a separation of 1000 feet is perfectly normal. PTI said the radar blips of both aircraft disappeared seven minutes after the Saudi airliner took off. The aircraft crashed about 60 miles west of Delhi.

Flights over most of India are not radar-controlled from the ground, and they use "procedural control" - strict separation by time, distance and altitude. Delhi airport is one of a



number currently undergoing a massive modernisation programme. It now has radar which reaches out to about 50 miles, and which is normally used only to monitor aircraft approaching Delhi, according to Peter Quinners, the technical director of the International Federation of Airline Pilots' Associations. Departing aircraft follow a standard path to link up with known airways.

The crash therefore probably occurred outside ground radar control, but why the two aircraft, which should have been widely separated in time, space and distance flew into each other remains a mystery.

In Britain, by contrast, the air traffic control tower normally hands over a departing aircraft to the regional air traffic control centre at about ten to twelve miles out. As in India, the airport spends more time monitoring inbound aircraft than outbound.

Indian airspace is extremely crowded because aircraft flying from the far east to Europe are funnelled through a corridor over the country. European airports are not open at night and therefore aircraft tend to congregate over Asia, where air traffic control, in one expert's words last night "Leaves something to be desired".



Worst ever: The scene after the 1977 Tenerife crash

Disaster is third worst in history

Elizabeth Wine

Yesterday's mid-air plane crash in India ranks third on the list of the world's worst air crashes. The causes of the top ten disasters are a mixed bag, falling into two main categories: terrorism or deliberate fire by the military; and mechanical or pilot failure.

The worst crash ever also resulted from the collision of two planes and killed 528 people. In March 1977, two Boeing 747s crashed on the ground at the airport on Tenerife.

Four of the ten most lethal air crashes involved a single plane crashing either through pilot error, mechanical failure or bad weather. The remaining four downed planes had been targeted by terrorists or shot down by military aircraft of another country.

The Pan-Am 747 crash over Lockerbie, Scotland, that killed 270 people was the result of a terrorist bomb. The horror of that crash was revisited this summer with the explosion of TWA Flight 800 over Long Island, New York, killing 230 people.

The plane fell into the Atlantic after exploding in a fireball minutes after what seemed to be a routine takeoff. The cause of the crash, in which everyone on board was killed, is still a mystery. Another crash attributed to terrorism killed 329 in June 1985 when an Air India Boeing 747 crashed off the coast of Ireland.

One of two crashes in the top ten involving the military came in July 1988 when the USS Vinces shot down an Iran Air A300 Airbus over the Gulf killing 290. The other commercial craft, a Korean Air Lines 747, was shot down by a Soviet fighter after it flew near Sakhalin, killing 26 people.

The second-worst crash killed 520 people when a Japan Air Lines Boeing 747 crashed into a mountain on a domestic flight in August 1985. A Turkish DC-10 crashed northeast of Paris in March 1974, killing 346. In August 1980, a Saudi Arabian L-1011 jet crashed, killing 301, while attempting an emergency landing at Riyadh airport. An American Airlines DC-10 crashed upon takeoff in Chicago, killing 273 in May 1979.

Other deadly mid-air collisions include the crash of a Libyan airliner and an air force MiG-23 fighter that killed 15 people in December 1992. The crash killed all the passengers and crew aboard the Boeing 747 but the fighter crew parachuted to safety.

BA told to pay £3m to Gulf 'human shields'

Mary Dejevsky
Paris

British Airways yesterday lost its appeal against having to pay compensation to French passengers who were held as "human shields" in Kuwait in the opening weeks of the Gulf War. Upholding the year-old judgment of a lower court, a Paris judge ruled that half the compensation should be paid at once, and stipulated that BA could not launch a further appeal until that payment had been made.

The 61 passengers have been awarded between 400,000 and 600,000 francs (\$80,000-120,000) each, according to the time they spent in captivity, a total bill for BA of more than £3m. The Paris appeals court confirmed the compensation for all but five of the 61

hostages, for whom it made minor adjustments.

A lawyer acting for BA said immediately after the judgment that the company intended to appeal. However, a spokeswoman for British Airways in Paris later said no decision had been taken. She said the company was "disappointed" at losing and "surprised" at the conditions set for a further appeal. "BA has always said the idea it would deliberately endanger the safety of passengers or employees was preposterous," she said, "and we will vigorously defend ourselves."

The original case was brought by 61 French citizens who were among more than 300 passengers on flight BA149 from London to Kuala Lumpur. The flight made an unscheduled landing at Kuwait City, four hours after Iraqi

troops had entered the territory on 2 August 1990.

The passengers found themselves held hostage for three months and some were used as "human shields" at sites which were considered by the Iraqis to be strategically important.

The French passengers argue that BA committed a "severe error" in allowing the flight to proceed. They also allege the stopover was intended to deliver a group of 15 undercover SAS commandos, a charge which has been denied by BA and by the British government.

BA has paid compensation to British and US passengers, but has not admitted liability, settling claims out of court. The hostages have also been paid compensation of around 30,000 francs (£4,000) each out of a French state fund for victims of terrorist or similar attacks.

First novel is shock winner of France's top literary prize

The Prix Goncourt, France's most prestigious literary prize, was awarded yesterday to Pascale Roze for her first novel, *Chasseur Zero* (Zero Hunter). As only the eighth woman to win the award since it was instituted in 1903, Ms Roze joins a rarefied band that includes such intellectual luminaries as Simone de Beauvoir and Marguerite Duras, writes Mary Dejevsky.

Her winning novel relates the long search of a daughter to find out about the death of her father, killed by a Japanese kamikaze pilot during the Second World War.

The award of the prize for a first novel raised eyebrows when it was announced on yesterday's lunchtime television news. Aficionados of the Goncourt also expressed astonishment that the award had gone for the second time in three years to the publishing house Albin Michel.

Three of France's biggest publishers - Gallimard, Le Seuil and Grasset - act as trustees for all five of France's top literary awards, and the back-stabbing politics of French publishing are traditionally regarded as no less important in deciding the awards than literary merit.

The tally of Goncourts since the beginning stands at 82 for Gallimard, 59 for Grasset and 29 for Le Seuil, with Albin Michel the next best placed with 14 awards.

Some believe that the appointment last year of two new judges to the 10-member Goncourt committee injected a degree of surprise and openness into an increasingly stuffy and incestuous process.

The award of last year's prize to Andrei Makine, a Russian



Title winner: Pascale Roze, whose novel *Zero Hunter* took this year's Prix Goncourt

who has since been granted French citizenship, was particularly controversial. Not only was he a Russian writing in French, but he had already been named winner of the Medici prize for the same novel, *The French Testament*, and the Goncourt had always stood out against sharing prize-winning novels.

If the attitude of the committee has started the change, the value of the prize has not. It remains at a paltry 50 francs, far outweighed by the prestige to the writer of winning and the certainty that sales of the winning novel will soar. A Prix Goncourt can still make or break a publishing house.

The process of selection, a series of ballots which take place over a gourmet lunch at the Drouant restaurant in central Paris, has not changed either. Ms Roze's novel won on the third ballot, after the chairman - whose vote counts for double - opted against one of this year's favourites, *Rhapsodie Cubaine*, by Eduardo Manet, a French-normalised Cuban writer.

Another favourite, *Instructions des Teniers*, by Nancy Huston, a Canadian writer who lives in Paris, appeared not to be in the running. One explanation was that the jury wanted a born and bred French winner this year to end a run of foreign and colonial writers.

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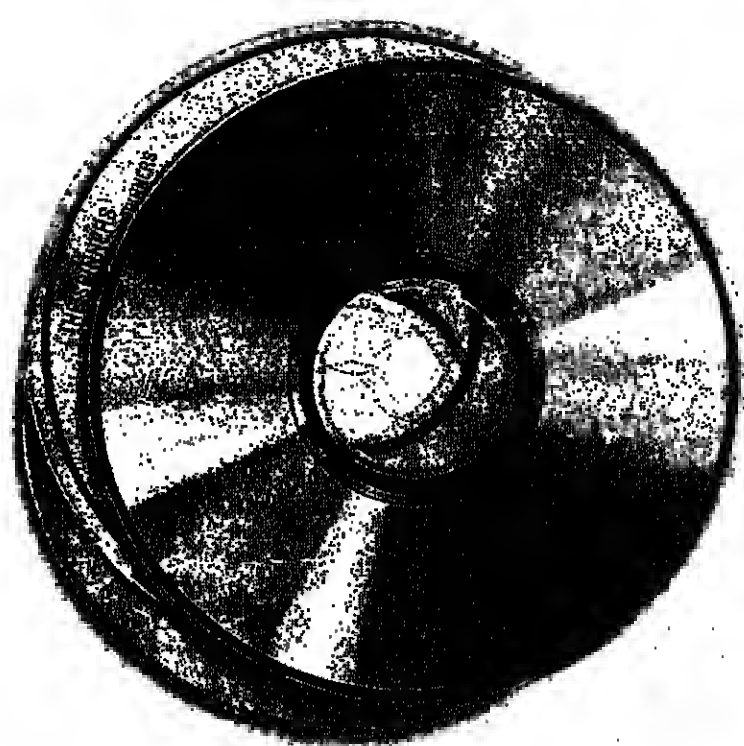
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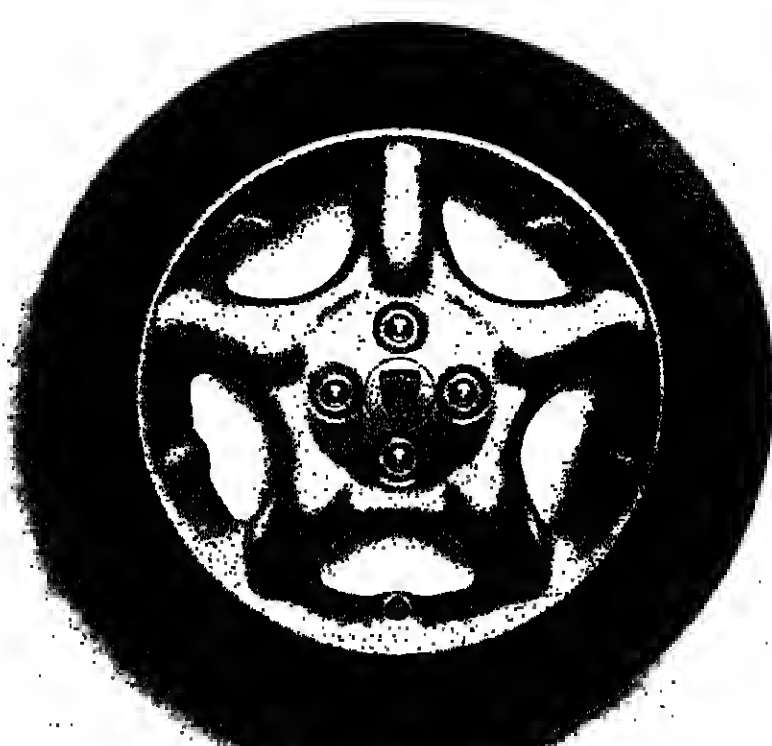
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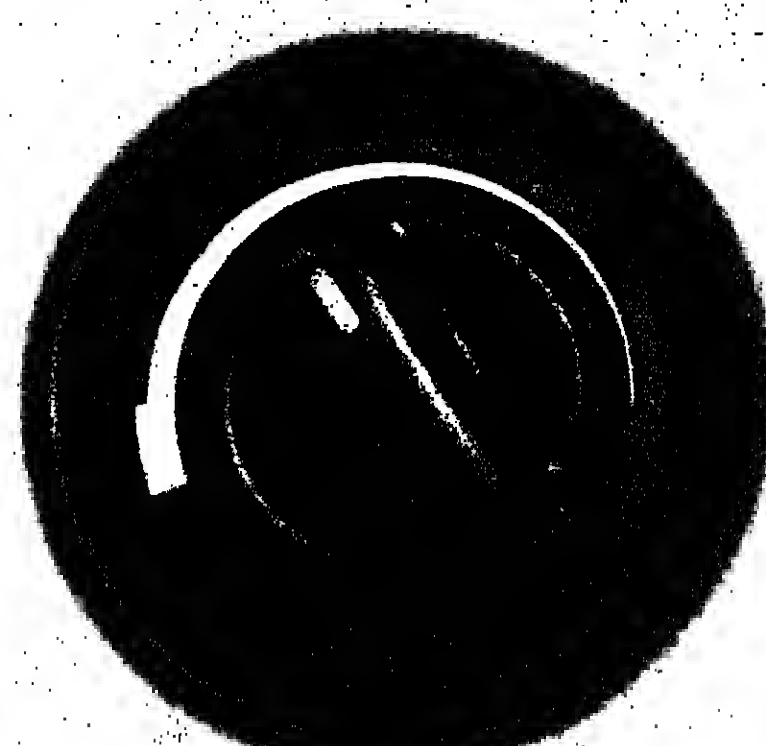
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مركز الاميل

Russia in danger as army nears collapse

Tony Barber
Moscow

Russia's defence minister, General Igor Rodionov, warned yesterday that the armed forces were in such chaos that the stability of the Russian state itself might soon come under threat.

"If extreme measures are not taken to reform the army in the near future, the consequences for the state could be catastrophic," he told generals called to assess the results of combat training in 1996.

General Rodionov, appointed by President Boris Yeltsin last July, described this year as the worst for the army since Russia launched its market-based economic reforms in 1992. "The armed forces have reached a point beyond which any further reduction in their combat readiness may lead to unpredictable, tragic consequences," he said.

His remarks were among the most stark assessments of the condition of the armed forces that any top-ranking general has made since Mr Yeltsin won reelection in July. Alexander Lebed, the president's recent-

ly sacked security supremo, warned during his brief spell in office that the armed forces might mutiny, but General Rodionov made clear that the real danger lay not in a rebellion but in the army's disintegration.

This view is shared by Western intelligence services and defence analysts. In a recently leaked report, the CIA said the crisis in the armed forces was so acute that control had weakened over Russia's nuclear weapons arsenal.

The London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies said last month that an even greater threat was theft of conventional weapons. Soldiers who have not received wages for months have been selling weapons on the black market, often to Russian criminal gangs.

Mr Yeltsin underlined his concern about the issue by phoning the prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, from the hospital where he is recovering from a quintuple heart bypass. A Kremlin spokesman said that the president had specifically asked whether the government had taken action to ensure ser-



Rodionov: Chaos in military could prove tragic for state

months, partly because of a collapse in government revenues caused by tax-dodging state and private companies. The total in unpaid wages is 43 trillion rubles (£4.9bn).

The head of Russia's advisory Defence Council, Yuri Buturin, provided bizarre confirmation of the army's problems last month when he said that no one actually knows how big the army is. He estimated there were 2.5 million servicemen, but said this figure included "ghost troops" that did not appear in the official military budget - a practice dating from Communist times.

Mr Yeltsin promised last May that he would abolish conscription by 2000 and transform the army into a smaller, all-professional force. Yet the cost of introducing such a reform is so high that Russian military analysts do not expect it to take effect until well into the next century.

General Rodionov favours the switch to an all-professional force, but has made clear that he thinks Mr Yeltsin's timetable is unrealistic.



Hot stuff: Lava spewing from the Pacaya volcano in Guatemala after it erupted on Monday, sending a cloud of ash two miles high, forcing the evacuation of nearby villages

Photograph: Kimberley White/Reuters

Israel isolated on Hebron

Patrick Cockburn
Jerusalem

Israel and the Palestinians could agree on Hebron in 24 hours, but are divided on a further withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank, according to US officials. The previous Israeli government signed an accord promising the stage-by-stage redeployment which has not been implemented.

"They could reach agreement in 24 hours, but it could also take two or three weeks," said Robert Pelletreau, the US Assistant Secretary of State yesterday in Cairo. "It is a question of how much you are going to tie in Hebron with other Hebron issues and that hasn't been resolved."

Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader, is concerned that the

intense international pressure on Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, to implement the present stage of the Oslo agreement will be relaxed if he signs an agreement dealing exclusively with Hebron. He wants autonomous Palestinian areas to be progressively expanded as previously agreed.

The pressure on Israel was evident at the Middle East and North Africa economic conference which opened in Cairo yesterday with speeches by Warren Christopher, the US secretary of State, and the European Union troika of ministers led by Dick Spring, the Irish Foreign Minister.

The annual regional economic conference, attended this year by 3,500 government officials and businessmen, in the past proclaimed as a sign of Is-

raeli integration into the Middle East, is this year a sign of its isolation. In the months since he took office in June, Mr Netanyahu has presided over a deterioration in Israel's relations with 27 foreign countries says Haim Baran, an Israeli commentator.

President Mubarak of Egypt emphasised his coolness towards the new Israeli government last month by refusing to attend a summit in Washington, called after the violence in September which left 60 Palestinians and 15 Israelis dead. King Hussein of Jordan, at first cordial with Mr Netanyahu, has since visited Jericho with Mr Arafat.

Mr Netanyahu is under closer international scrutiny than his Labour predecessors. Labour started the economically dev-

astating closures of the West Bank and Gaza in 1993 and increased the number of Jewish settlers by 50,000 in four years, but did not have to face the same volume of criticism as the present right-wing Likud government.

Mr Christopher, told the conference that "the peace process has shown great resilience." However Mr Christopher has failed in repeated efforts to broker a peace treaty with Syria, based on an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

Direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians on Hebron resumed last night. At issue in the city is the extent of the Israeli right of hot pursuit, the calibre of weapons to be used by police and the use of one main street.

David Osborne
New York

In an extraordinary diplomatic breach with its closest ally, Britain yesterday joined all of its European Union partners in siding against the United States in voting for a resolution at the United Nations calling for an end to the three-decade-long American economic embargo of Cuba. The vote was a landmark in the development of a common European foreign policy.

The dramatic turnaround by Britain and other EU members in a vote at the UN General Assembly was triggered by widespread anger at the US over its recent passage of the so-called Helms-Burton Act, which seeks to penalise foreign companies doing business inside Cuba. The EU has asked the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to declare the legislation illegal.

Europe unites in UN vote to call for end to 30-year trade embargo

Approval by the General Assembly of a resolution calling for an end to the US embargo has become an annual ritual that serves to embarrass Washington. Until now, however, Britain and other EU states, including last year Germany and the Netherlands, have abstained.

Yesterday, however, marked the first time that the EU has adopted a common position on the issue, voting in favour of the Cuban resolution. "This is the first time we have voted as a block in this, and it reflects our common opposition to Helms-Burton," a senior diplomat said. In a joint statement, the EU said it remained critical of the regime of Fidel Castro and that it recognised that the economic plight in Cuba remained

in part of the regime's making. It went on, however, to castigate the US for adopting the Helms-Burton Act. The EU has joined a chorus of foreign protest at the legislation, led also by Canada and Mexico, on the grounds that it represents an illegal extension of US law to foreign countries.

In the bluntly worded statement, the EU declared: "We cannot accept that the United States may unilaterally determine or restrict the European Union's economic and commercial relations with any other state. Measures of this type violate the general principles of international law and the sovereignty of independent states." Victor Marrero, US representative to the assembly, swiftly fired back, however. "By

introducing this resolution ... Cuba has manipulated the concerns of countries around the world to claim support for its reprehensible policies of intolerance and oppression."

The vote comes as one more humiliation in what has already been an unusually difficult week for the US at the United Nations. Only days ago, the US also found itself the victim of hostility over its debt to the UN as well as its efforts to unseat the Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros Ghali, when, for the first time in the UN's history, Washington was denied a seat on the organisation's most important budgetary committee.

Cuba's vice-president, Carlos Lage Davila, said the assembly had voted "not only against a policy that is unfair, but also to make sure that no state, however powerful, may be able to ignore international law".

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significant shorts

Police arrest third of South Pacific army

More than 100 members of Vanuatu's paramilitary force, which abducted the South Pacific nation's President last month in a pay dispute, were arrested yesterday, the Justice Minister, Father Walter Lini, said.

"The law and order of Vanuatu is now in the hands of the Vanuatu police force," Mr Lini said from the capital, Port Vila. The police said that 138 of the 300-strong Vanuatu Mobile Force, which is effectively Vanuatu's army, had been arrested.

The VMP claims the government has failed to pay its members special duty allowances amounting to £780,000 since 1992.

On 12 October, the VMP abducted the President, Jean-Marie Leye, from his home and forced him to fly to a nearby island where he was kept for several hours. The cabinet resolved to pay the allowance by the end of October, but no payment has been made. Port Vila - Reuters

Men attack shrine women

A group of women who came to pray at the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest site, were attacked by Orthodox men who threw chairs to try to make them leave.

A police officer was injured while escorting about 50 women away from other worshippers. Jerusalem - AP

Bhutto leaves with escort of supporters

Benazir Bhutto moved out of her official residence into a private home, surrounded by chanting supporters, a week after being sacked as Pakistan's prime minister after being accused of corruption.

"I think this whole thing stinks," she said at the home of Senator Gulzar Ahmed, where she will temporarily stay with her three children. Islamabad - Reuters

Qatar picks its first lady

Qatar broke appointed its first woman to a senior government post. The Gulf state's Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, issued a decree appointing Sheikhha Ahmed al-Mahmoud undersecretary at the Ministry of Education and Culture. Doha - Reuters

Marriage-mix lesbian barred

A lesbian who married a male transsexual attacked her church for barring her. "I feel in my own eyes that no one has the right to tell me where I can go to hear God's word," Debi Eastersday said. The Medina Church of the Brethren had her escorted off the property by a police officer on Sunday. Akron, Ohio - AP

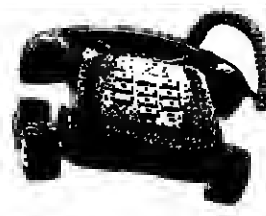
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CRISIS IN AFRICA

Zaire aid fails to reach lost and hungry

David Orr
Kinshasa

Despite high hopes that the first aid deliveries would start reaching refugees in Zaire, political blockages and bureaucratic obstacles continue to impede the aid agencies.

Yesterday the humanitarian organisations were still engaged in frustrating talks in Kinshasa with the Zairean government about the delivery of supplies to the most needy areas. Large numbers of desperate refugees are understood to be gathered around the town of Lohutu, to the east of Kisangani, which is set to become the centre for the growing aid operation.

"The Zairean government is making things difficult for the aid agencies because they are afraid they'll freeze the refugee problem for good," said one Western diplomat in Kinshasa. "The Zaireans want the refugees to go back to Rwanda, not to settle even deeper inside Zairean territory."

But there is another problem. Almost one month after eastern Zaire's refugees started fleeing their camps - and one week after the first reports that they are dying of disease, hunger and thirst - there is still no certainty as to where most of them are. More than 1 million Rwandan and Burundian refugees, as well as countless thousands of displaced Zaireans, have been driven deep into the inhospitable interior of Zaire by fighting raging in the east of the country.

"We hope to have a better idea of their location by the end of the week," said Sergio Vieira de Mello, of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"A large concentration from one camp has been spotted from the air but we don't know where most of them are. We can't say for certain if they are dying in large numbers but we know their food probably ran out at the end of last week."

Having escaped the fighting between the Zairean army and the rebels who have now taken control of much of the east, the fleeing mass of humanity is now prey to the degradations of bureaucracy.

Aid convoys which crossed from Rwanda into eastern Zaire were yesterday stalled as negotiations continued between aid officials and rebel leader, Laurent Kabila.

The rebels were insisting that their authority in the region be recognised by the United Nations before the distribution of food and blankets could begin.

"The number of refugees who have emerged around Goma saying they are prepared to be repatriated to Rwanda can be counted in hundreds," said Mr de Mello.

"There are also some needy civilians in the town; the situation in Bukavu is much more serious: there's no food or medical supplies and there are lots of wounded."

The cross-border relief effort is for the moment largely symbolic. The far greater need is beyond Goma and Bukavu, which he are deep in the heart of Zaire.

But the Zairean government is insisting that supplies must be shipped through the capital, Kinshasa, in the far west of the country.

Though they have lost control of their eastern border region, the Zairean authorities are insisting that aid organisations must not contravene Zairean sovereignty by dealing with the insurgents.

"It's all a bit of a mess," said one aid official in Kinshasa.

"The aid operation in the east, with the UN talking to the rebels, has put the Zairean

government in a difficult position. I don't think the government is going to be so stupid as to punish the aid organisations but they're unlikely to give immediate approval for a full scale aid effort. They'll probably just approve a bit at a time."

Most of Zaire's missing refugees are Rwandans, members of the country's Hutu majority, who fled their country after at least half a million Tutsis were massacred by Hutu militias in 1994.

They crossed the border to escape advancing Tutsi rebels who put an end to the genocide and formed a new government in Rwanda.

The refugees were again put to flight last month as fighting flared between the Zairean army and Tutsi guerrillas in eastern Zaire.

A UNHCR and United Nations World Food Programme mission is due to arrive in Kisangani today to assess the security situation and humanitarian needs.

So far, no refugees are understood to have reached Kisangani, which has been badly looted by retreating Zairean troops. The International Committee of the Red Cross has got clearance to deliver a small shipment of supplies to Kisangani today, but not yet to deliver aid to the displaced people beyond the town.



Stand-off: Zairean students expelled from their university by the army stand at a gate at Our Lady of Kinshasa Cathedral. The troops forced those with no homes in the capital to gather there

Boutros: Twelve nations to join forces

Rome (Reuters) - Canada was ready to lead a multinational force in Zaire, the United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, said yesterday, adding that he was optimistic progress was being made to end an "intolerable" tragedy. He expected more than 12 countries would make up the Canadian-led force, and hoped the United States would provide logistical support.

"He had been in contact with Canada's Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien. 'I express my gratitude to Canada. Canada has accepted to command these multinational forces... Canada is a very neutral country.'"

Mr Boutros-Ghali said South Africa's President, Nelson Mandela, and some European states, including Italy, had also agreed in principle to commit troops to a humanitarian force.

"We are in contact with Canada, Italy, France, Spain and we hope also to have logistical support from the United States." The size of the force had not been decided but Mr Boutros-Ghali said: "People are talking of between 10,000 and 12,000."

Mr Boutros-Ghali said he was confident a Canadian-led force, with African participation, would prove acceptable to Rwanda's Tutsi-led government, which has refused to agree to leadership from Paris. It says French troops sent in 1994 to help end genocide protected Hutus blamed for the slaughter.

France has pushed hardest for troops to be sent to Zaire to open humanitarian corridors to get food and water to starving Rwandan and Burundian refugees and displaced Zaireans. The French have attacked the US for dragging its feet.

Britain has said it will take a preliminary decision in the next "couple of days" on whether to contribute personnel to a proposed humanitarian force in Zaire. "It looks likely that there will be an international force and there will be interest here in contributing to it if we can (and) if there is a workable military plan."

Spain's Foreign Minister, Abel Matutes, said the UN might give a green light within 48 hours to the deployment of a multinational force in Zaire.

Spain is prepared to send 300 soldiers and will consider whether to send more later on. The troops would secure humanitarian corridors to help distribute aid.

In Nairobi, Kenya's Foreign Minister, Kalonzo Musyoka, said he planned to visit Zaire's ailing President Mobutu Sese Seko, who is convalescing at his villa in Nice, France, after treatment in Switzerland for prostate cancer.

The Organisation of African Unity's Committee for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution met on Monday in Addis Ababa and said it regretted the UN Security Council had not deployed a neutral multinational force, as urged by an African summit last week in Nairobi.



Mobutu: Still convalescing in villa in France

Canada attempts to regain peace image

Making amends for the Somalia mess is not the only motive for sending soldiers to Africa again, says Hugh Winsor

Ottawa - The Canadian Government, anxious to regain the initiative in United Nations peace-keeping operations and to take advantage of its experience in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, has offered to take the lead role in organising a small military force to act as a disaster-assistance response team in eastern Zaire.

The Canadian forces are prepared to send a lightly armed mobile unit of French-speaking officers with previous UN peace-keeping operations in Rwanda immediately as a vanguard unit for a larger UN force.

The Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, contacted 15 world leaders over the weekend, urging support for such a force. "Prime Minister Chrétien decided that the urgency of the situation required some action," a spokesman for the Foreign Affairs Department said yesterday.

The Foreign Minister, Lloyd Axworthy, called off a visit to Cairo for a Middle East economic conference in order to work full-time on the force.

The Canadian motivation is a mixture of altruism and a desire to refurbish a reputation for UN peace-keeping that was stained by several incidents in Somalia.

In one case, a group of Canadian soldiers tortured and beat to death a 16-year-old Somali youth caught attempting to steal from the Canadian compound. There were also two questionable shooting incidents in which Somalis were killed.

Canada's record on UN peace-keeping goes back to the aftermath of the Suez Crisis in

1956. Lester Pearson, then Secretary of State for External Affairs and later Prime Minister, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for initiating the UN peace-force concept.

But Canadian forces operate in both French and English as an advantage in this part of Africa. Also, Canadian generals commanded the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda during the upheaval in 1994. The current initiative is also related to frustrations left from that period when Canadian commanders wanted to increase the Unamir force and intervene to stop the killings.

Instead, the Security Council reduced the Unamir force and UN headquarters ordered the peace-keepers not to intervene. Apart from political motivations, the Canadian government has also come under pressure from several of the Canadian-based humanitarian agencies which played key roles in the Zairean refugee camps before they were forced to flee by the current fighting.

Canadian missionary organisations, especially the Roman Catholic White Fathers, have been active in the area, founding a university in Rwanda, for instance. They have links both with the refugees and the current leadership in both Rwanda and Burundi.

There is also a desire to back up the work of Raymond Chrétien, the Prime Minister's nephew, who has been designated the special envoy of the UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and who is now in Kinshasa.

One of the leaders of the Canadian initiative is Robert Fowler, the Canadian representative at the United Nations, who was Deputy Minister of National Defence when the Canadians headed the Unamir and who was a teacher in Rwanda before he joined the foreign service.

Canada believes that by taking the initiative it can overcome obstacles that have brought Franco-Spanish proposals to a standstill. In particular, there is resistance to French participation, because the Rwandan government, led by the Rwandese Patriotic Front, resents the French alliance with the former Hutu government. It was the creation of Zone Turquoise in the south-west sector of Rwanda two years ago, protected by French forces, which permitted leaders of the Interahamwe militia, responsible for the massacre of Tutsis, to escape to Zaire.

Canada's initial group would be an advance team of 180 to 200 men specialising in communications, a mobile field hospital and a water-purification system. Unconfirmed reports said Canada was prepared to commit up to 1,500 troops but was counting on help from other Western countries, especially the United States, which has the airlift capacity to get the Canadians with their equipment and their Grizzlies, lightly armoured wheeled scout cars, to Goma quickly. The Canadian contingent to Unamir created an extensive microwave communications network in Rwanda which can be reactivated and extended into Zaire.

France moves troops to Congo

Kinshasa (Reuters) - France has moved troops to Congo, just across the river from the troubled Zairean capital Kinshasa to intervene to protect French citizens if needed, diplomats said yesterday.

"They are there simply as a precaution in case it is necessary to protect French citizens in Kinshasa," one diplomat said.

Diplomats said that a company of French troops flew to the Congolese capital, Brazzaville, on Monday from a base in Gabon, one of France's former African colonies, where French troops are based under defence accords. A company normally numbers about 120 men.

No official comment was immediately available from French embassies in Kinshasa or Brazzaville. The two cities

Force ready to cross river if needed to protect French citizens in Kinshasa

are separated by the River Zaire.

Tension has been mounting in Kinshasa over the past two weeks since news struck home of a humiliating defeat of Zairean soldiers by Rwandan-backed ethnic Tutsi rebels in the east of the country.

Rebellious students allied to the radical opposition have been demonstrating in a campaign to topple the Prime Minister, Kengo wa Dondo, who is part Tutsi and whose government is accused of doing too little in the face of the rebellion.

The French troops arrived on the eve of a deadline today set by the students for Mr Kengo's resignation, but a student

leader said that the ultimatum had been deferred until further notice.

On Monday students set up roadblocks on Kinshasa streets and hijacked vehicles, bringing transport and business in the city of five million people to a standstill. Shops were shut, as many people feared a bout of looting.

French troops intervened in Kinshasa in 1991 and 1993 to evacuate French citizens and other Europeans after army-led looting in which hundreds of Zaireans died. The French ambassador was shot dead in the rioting in 1993.

Tension was close to boiling point last week after two stu-

dents were killed in clashes with security forces.

Angry students briefly occupied parliament and paraded the coffins of their fallen comrades. Authorities reacted on Sunday by shutting two flashpoint campuses in Kinshasa. Troops drove out students at gunpoint before dawn on Monday. A leading student activist, Steve Mbikayi, said yesterday that the suspension of the deadline for Mr Kengo's resignation was tactical.

"We are waiting to negotiate with the government to reopen two colleges that were shut down at the weekend. When they were kicked off the campuses, many of the students had no homes to go to."

Once they are back on campus we will continue the struggle," Mr Mbikayi said.

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A long, hard week for Major and the Eurocrats

The good news is that British employees will now benefit from a law that enables them to stick to a sensible working week, without the risk of being sacked, and have proper paid holidays. The bad news is that the European Commission is introducing this legislation in the wrong way, and thereby undermining the pro-European argument in Britain.

Paid holidays and shorter working hours are good for our wellbeing, and therefore a social good, too. You cannot be pro-family (as many Tories would claim to be) and at the same time object to the substance of this law.

Yesterday, the European Court of Justice stamped on John Major's objections and ruled that the new directive on working time is legitimate European health and safety legislation. Britain cannot opt out. These entitlements – a reasonable amount of time off work to lead a normal family and social life – ought to be unexceptionable in a modern, civilised economy. Children rarely get a glimpse of parents working long hours, domestic relationships suffer under the strain, and our national quality of life deteriorates. All work and no play (or rest) makes Jack a dull boy, Jill a tired mum, and John a shallow and grumpy husband. The argument that we need to work

longer and longer hours to compete with low-paid workers in undeveloped economies holds no water: their workers will no doubt raise their social expectations as they get richer.

There are those who thrive on stress, who enjoy nothing more than working, and who cannot think of better ways to spend their time. They will still be allowed to work longer hours if they wish. Indeed, the effect of the legislation is likely to be largely symbolic – a signal to employers that an excessively zealous work ethic may damage creativity, good working relations, and ultimately productivity and commitment. Unions will be in a far stronger position negotiating hours and annual holidays for vulnerable workers. So if the Government had introduced this legislation of its own volition, we would have applauded it.

John Major's government, obsessed with deregulation and intimidated by employers, does not appreciate that social legislation is a necessary function of government in a competitive market economy. The business demand for zero interference is absurd. There is a necessary tension between the business world's wish to be left unfettered in its search for profit, and any government's proper role, which is to create a climate for competitive business while meeting social expectations.



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Companies that are competitive purely on the basis of pushing hard-pressed employees beyond sensible physical limits are not helping the wider social world. Indeed, it is not mainly their business to care about the wider social world. That is one reason we have governments, rather than corporations, to run our lives: to look after our non-profit oriented interests.

It even makes sense for European countries to introduce such social legislation together, if they can agree. But there is no excuse for disguising social legislation like this as a health

and safety matter. By leveraging it in through the back door, the European Union risks discrediting its legislative process.

The Commission argued (and the European Court agreed) that long hours are bad for our health, and that restricting them is therefore legitimate health and safety legislation. The premise may well be true. But who can tell what the optimal number of hours worked may be? Is 48 hours monitoring a building site as bad for our health as 48 hours carrying bricks, or 48 hours spent at head office worrying about whether bud-

gets could be met? (Irrelevantly, but interestingly, how does a 60-hour week in a calm, friendly office compare with a dawn-to-dusk week at home on your own in a small house looking after several small children?)

Moreover, the European governments who backed the original proposal have undermined the force of their argument by their own exemptions. If working more than 48 hours really is so bad for our health, and if the European Union has our health so much at heart, why are so many workers excluded? The health of doctors and transport workers is no less important than the health of everyone else. If these people are so readily exempt, then presumably the rigid 48 hours is not so important to our health after all, in which case it should not be a part of health and safety legislation.

Indeed, one of the groups specifically excluded, doctors in training, have one of the best health and safety cases of all for a limit on working hours: a bad diagnosis by an exhausted casualty doctor who has spent 24 hours on his or her feet could be fatal.

The Conservative Party will make much of today's decision in the run-up to the election. It is evidence, they will say, that our European partners want to meddle destructively in our lives. But Mr Major should be care-

ful how he plays this issue. Voters may accept, when they hear all the arguments, that Europe should not be interfering and imposing itself in this way. But will overworked people want to vote for a party that specifically rejects employment protection? If Mr Major thinks his stance will only win him votes he should think again. Perhaps his judgment is awry. Perhaps he is working unduly long hours.

Seventies nosh the new rock 'n' roll

Cocktail prawns are making a comeback. According to *EatSoup*, the latest magazine from the *Loaded* stable, Seventies food is in. The New Lads to which the magazine is appealing can drool over top chefs, cooing the vin, orange the duck and trifling the sherry. Well it's a start, lads. At least they have graduated from beef burgers, and take-away curries with six-packs. But they haven't quite grown up yet, if they are yearning for the food their parents prepared at dinner parties. What next, though, for the boys before the booze? Cheese and wine? Fondue sets? Let's hope they never have to sink so low as a spattering of pesto.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

What the Lib Dems need from Labour

Sir: John Rentoul ("Blair to come out for voting reform", 11 November) should not get too excited. The sort of practical co-operation he describes between Liberal Democrats and Labour is a sensible means to the efficient conduct of business and happens between more parties and at more times than the public is ever likely to be told about.

At present the muffled drumbeat of Labour retreats on such issues as devolution, a Bill of Rights, minimum sentences, and now the Social Chapter, is doing nothing to encourage Liberal Democrats to make that collaboration any closer. As a party we do not regard the Alternative Vote as a proportional system and it is unlikely that any Labour commitment to it would change our inclinations.

Our position remains as stated by Paddy Ashdown at Brighton: "Nothing ruled in and nothing ruled out." As to how we might apply that position, Shirley Williams at Brighton said that our bare minimum terms for closer co-operation should be a fully proportional system of voting and a massive increase in funding for education. The electric enthusiasm which greeted that remark is something from which Tony Blair should take warning.
EARL RUSSELL
(Liberal Democrat Social Security Spokesperson)
House of Lords
London SW1

Sir: I was interested to read John Rentoul's story that Tony Blair attended a birthday party at my house in February.

I would like to use your columns to reassure my family and many friends, who may be offended that they were not invited to this event, that no such party took place.
MR HON PADDY ASHDOWN MP
(Yeovil, Liberal Democrat)
House of Commons
London SW1

Pernicious attack on Saro-Wiwa

Sir: What Richard D North is saying about Ken Saro-Wiwa and Shell ("Can you be sure of Ken Saro-Wiwa?", 8 November) can be refuted by those who know the facts – as your correspondents demonstrate (letters 11 November). What he is doing is far more pernicious.

When an investigative journalist builds a career on the fearless uncovering of official secrets; when a research scientist blows the whistle on dangerous pollutants or unexpected threats to health; when a politician spends years in the wilderness nursing his reputation for honesty; watch them. Their records make us trust them. When the journalist exposes fellow campaigners as frauds; when the scientist endorses procedures others are warning against; when the politician chafes a sensitive inquiry producing an anti-democratic report, our trust in them as individuals may lead us to accept their word.

The day when the polluter starts paying has to come: like death, it is inevitable – because death is the alternative.
Richard D North and his ilk are being paid to postpone it.
ROSALINDA JONES
York



Heseltine behind metric chaos

Sir: Your correspondent Chris Keenan (letter, 7 November) bewails metric muddle at the supermarket.

In the mid-1960s the government created the Metrication Board to smooth the transition from imperial to metric measurements. By dint of a little nudging here and a little encouragement there, the board persuaded industry to change, and indeed the pharmaceutical and building industries (among others) did so, in such a manner as not to cause trouble to the public.

At the beginning of the Thatcher years, Michael Heseltine, who disapproved of quangoes, abolished the Metrication Board in order to save a little money. The expensive metrication has required that all pre-packed goods have to be sold in metric measures within supermarkets. Products sold loose, such as off the delicatessen counter, can continue to be sold in imperial units until 1 January 2000. We should have introduced unit pricing in the United Kingdom in the middle of this year, and this would have required products to be sold in standardised packs, or for information to be carried on shelf-edge labels which indicated the price per 100 grams or 100 millilitres. Sainsbury's shelves

edge labels carry this information. Unfortunately, much of industry was not as well organised, and as a result unit pricing was pushed back and the exact timetable is still a matter for debate.
STEPHEN R RIDGE
Quality Assurance Executive
Somerfield Stores
Bristol

Best way to help Zaire refugees

Sir: As a medical doctor and aid worker who has experienced more than 10 wars around the world, I want as much as anyone to see relief brought to the 700,000 refugees in Goma, Zaire.

But the international community faces a dilemma. A quick fix that freezes the situation and recreates the refugee camps will just cause another conflict and crisis in a few months' or a year's time.

Any international intervention must have two objectives: the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and the safe return of these refugees to Rwanda.

This will require courage from the politicians, and careful operational planning to encourage the return of the refugees. But if the painful facts are not faced, if the camps are simply recreated, more people will die.
JOHN HOWARTH
Medical Director
MERLIN (Medical Emergency Relief International)
London W1

Millennium dome will pollute sky

Sir: An illuminated dome is being planned to hold the millennium exhibition at Greenwich, the theme of which is "time" (report, 1 November).

Greenwich has been chosen as it is considered the most significant place to deal with this theme. Greenwich is also the historical centre of astronomy in the UK, time and astronomy being inextricably linked.

Astronomers are fighting a rearguard action to defend as much of the night sky from light pollution as possible. By the end of next century there may be nowhere in this country where one can see the great beauty of the sky.

London is not rural England, but I have observed from Essex and Hertfordshire, and if claims about this dome are true, these environments will be affected. I would prefer the dome were not built, but if it is built I hope it will be lit up for the year 2000 party and not illuminated again until the year 3000.

DAVID WAKEFIELD
Leeds, West Yorkshire

Sinn Fein's vote

Sir: According to Jack O'Sullivan ("My movie, right or wrong", 7 November), Neil Jordan claims that "in the 1918 general election Sinn Fein won 80 per cent of the vote". In *European Political Facts*

1918-84 (Macmillan 1986) Chris Cook and John Paxton state that (in the undivided Ireland) Sinn Fein received 496,961 votes, or 47.5 per cent of the total cast, with Unionists receiving 298,726 (28.5 per cent) and Nationalists 233,690 (22.3 per cent).

As Ireland then used the first-past-the-post electoral system, Sinn Fein did come first in 73 of the 105 Irish constituencies, against 26 by the Unionists and four by the Nationalists.

But as the turn-out was only 54 per cent, Sinn Fein actually received the support of 25.7 per cent of the electorate of Ireland, against 15.4 per cent for the Unionists and 12 per cent for the Nationalists.

Jordan may be bundling Sinn Fein and the Nationalists together and claiming 80 per cent support for Sinn Fein in what, three years later, was to become the Irish Free State.
ROGER BROAD
London W2

Bacon for birds?

Sir: A few years ago a bird programme on the radio warned us not to put out bacon scraps for birds, on the grounds that the salt in the bacon causes kidney damage and eventually kills them.

However, I have in front of me an RSPB booklet which lists chopped bacon rind as being suitable. What do reader experts think?
S WHEATLEY
Havant, Hampshire

John Patten's a pygmyist

Sir: If I were a pygmy, John Patten's article supporting Mr Said's "gift" to the University of Oxford would make me awfully cross ("Lucrative made the spires what they are", 9 November).

Queen Victoria saw fit to graciously receive pygmies at her court. Yet Mr Patten now uses the word "pygmy" as a term of abuse for his former colleagues, friends and constituents within the university. Should this not be looked upon by the Race Discrimination people?

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a pygmy is a member of a dwarf race existing in Central Equatorial Africa, and is also applied to chimpanzees and other anthropomorphical apes.
ANTHONY O'CONNOR
Finstock, Oxfordshire

Moon beats stamp

Sir: The Treskilling Yellow stamp is reported to be listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as "the most valuable object of any type by weight, volume and density" (9 November).

This may be true in the realm of manufactured objects. Surely the most valuable substance in the world is from out of this world – Moon rock. It took half a million scientists, technologists and engineers 10 years to bring pieces of rock from the Moon to the Earth at a cost of billions of dollars, consuming the best brains of two superpowers.
PETER STOCKILL
Middlesbrough, Cleveland

Treat rape trial women as adults

Sir: Proposals by Victim Support ("Charity calls for end to rape victims' ordeal", 11 November) to "protect" women from the ordeal of a rape trial are alarming.

Children giving evidence in sexual abuse cases need to be shielded from the court process, as they are vulnerable members of society who may be intimidated or emotionally damaged if they are subjected to forceful cross-examination or are face to face with their alleged abuser. The same argument is now being put forward for women.

The idea that adult women need "protection" is tantamount to suggesting that we are on a par with children. Quite apart from being highly insulting, this argument undermines the ability of women to be taken seriously or treated as equals in all other spheres of life.

I agree that the court experience can be stressful and unpleasant. However, this is inevitable to ensure that the defendant can test the evidence against him. The accused is rightly presumed innocent until proved guilty.

Nowadays the clamour to uphold "Victims' Rights" is leading to the erosion of true democratic rights. Whilst one can sympathise greatly with the plight of women giving evidence at trial, we should not let this give rise to the degradation of the adversarial system or allow the prosecution to abdicate its onerous responsibility to prove its case.

Women are adults and need to be treated as such. They are fully capable of withstanding and overcoming trauma.
JULIET CRITCHLEY
(Solicitor)
Freedom and Law
London W1

Spitfires at 16

Sir: Clare Garner writes in young boys who volunteered under age for service during the 1914-18 war (report, 11 November). This also happened during the 1939-45 war.

I served as a fighter pilot flying Spitfires during 1944-45. We had several pilots who were only 18 or 19, and, taking into account the time it took to train a pilot, they must have enlisted when they were 17, or 16 in some cases.
On VE Day we had one who was a flight commander at 19. He was one of the "old hands" of the squadron, having been on "Ops" for about 15 months and been decorated. The *Guinness Book of Records* reveals an RAF pilot flying Spitfires on "Ops" at the age of 16. I am sure there were many more.
M GRUGEON
Reading, Berkshire

Quiet irony

Sir: At exactly the time when much of the nation fell silent for two minutes on 11 November, the lead item on the 11am news on BBC Radio 4 reported British success in gaining a huge contract for Hawk jets, including more to Indonesia.
LYNN TEN KATE
Crookham Village, Hampshire

analysis

Thorpe's friends — and a murder conspiracy

Jeremy Thorpe's trial in 1979 shocked the nation. Jason Thompson evaluates the man and his life in the light of new evidence

On a rainy night in October 1975, two men drove along a lonely coastal road in Exmoor. Inside their yellow Mazda was a Great Dane called Rinka. The car stopped. Both men got out and Rinka jumped around in anticipation of her walk. One of the men pulled out a Mauser pistol and shot the Great Dane dead. "You can't involve Rinka!", her owner shouted. "You can't involve the dog." As the owner tried to give his beloved pet the kiss of life, the gunman levelled his weapon and pulled the trigger. The gun jammed. He kept trying, but the gun would not fire, so he jumped into the car and sped away from the scene.

One night 21 years later, film director Roy Ackerman was woken at his home by a bang on the door. It was Andrew Newton, the man who shot Rinka, arriving unannounced in response to months of phone calls and meetings with enigmatic go-betweens. After three hours of conversation, Newton agreed to tell his story of being hired to kill Rinka's owner, Norman Scott — Jeremy Thorpe's former lover.

The bizarre and astonishing series of events that led to the downfall of the dazzling Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe have never been fully explained. In 1979, Thorpe and his co-defendants went on trial at the Old Bailey for conspiring to murder Norman Scott. They were found not guilty. But in a Channel 4 *Secret Lives* documentary, broadcast next week, new evi-

dence from surviving witnesses suggests that a conspiracy did exist — and that it involved close friends and colleagues of the Liberal leader.

Jeremy Thorpe was a man of fascinating contradictions, balancing social ambitions with radical idealism. He was the son of a Tory MP, but it was the minority Liberal party that fired the young Thorpe's imagination. A passionate advocate of human rights causes such as apartheid and immigration, he mixed in aristocratic circles and his second marriage, in 1973, was to the Queen's cousin, Marion Harewood. In the era of Carnaby Street, Thorpe wore a three-piece suit, watch chain and tilly. Yet it was this Edwardian dandy who was to modernise the party, targeting marginal seats and exploiting new technology. He used helicopters and hovercrafts to conquer the remote constituency of North Devon, becoming an MP in 1959.

But away from the political stage, Thorpe was also a man with homosexual tendencies at a time when homosexual practices were still illegal. Political culture in the early 1960s was dominated by the Profumo affair, and fears that the British state could be jeopardised by its ministers' sexual indiscretions. Thorpe's encounter in 1961 with a stable groom, Norman Scott, was to determine the rest of his life. Feeling protective of the handsome young man, he suggested that Scott contact him should he need help. Scott visited Thorpe at Westminster and maintains that a sexual relationship began that night.

Thorpe denies the affair took place, but his letters testify to intimacy. One refers to Scott affectionately as "Bunnies", and concludes: "I miss you".

Thorpe had chosen a dangerous lover; Scott had a history of mental illness. After the affair cooled, an outburst in public that he wanted to kill Thorpe brought him to the attention of the Chelsea police. Scott gave a statement alleging an affair. In a 1979 LWT film, Inspector Robert Huntley explains that the inquiry was abandoned because the police suspected that Thorpe would simply issue a denial.

Scott was determined to be heard — by anyone who would listen. He pestered Thorpe to return his national insurance card, without which he could not get a job. He even sent his story to Thorpe's mother.

Thorpe turned for help in containing this persistent threat to close friend Peter Bessell. Thorpe, whose wit and charm inspired ferocious loyalty, had, according to Bessell, confided his homosexuality to his fellow West Country Liberal MP. Bessell was excited by the drama of his glamorous colleague's emerging crisis. At Thorpe's bidding, he kept Scott at bay in a cover-up that lasted 10 years. Bessell tried to find Scott a job abroad. He met the Social Services minister to resolve Scott's national insurance problems, and went to see the Home Secretary to reassure Thorpe that the police were no longer investigating him. He sent Scott money, describing the pay-offs as "retainers".

Meanwhile Thorpe's star was rising. In 1967, still only 38, he became party leader and was made a Privy Counsellor by his friend Harold Wilson. An internal Liberal party inquiry in 1971 concerning Scott's allegations came to nothing and at the General Election in February 1974 the Liberals won six million Liberal votes — the party's highest share for half a century. Edward Heath invited Thorpe to Downing St. A coalition government would have won Thorpe a cabinet post. But party members were appalled by the idea of supporting the Conservatives, and without party backing a coalition was impossible. Still, Thorpe had taken his party to the peak of its post-war fortunes.

It was also in 1974, however, that Thorpe's private life caught up with him. In January, Bessell fled the country in financial ruin. Needing a new minder, Thorpe turned to another close friend, Liberal deputy treasurer David Holmes. Holmes died in 1990, but is heard in the film describing Thorpe's obsession with the ever-loquacious Scott. "It gave Jeremy the sense of permanent persecution — that 'I will never be safe while that

man is around' ". Holmes paid Scott £2,500 for a cache of what he believed to be incriminating letters, which he burned in a friend's Aga. But the measure was not enough to silence Scott. Drastic action was needed. Holmes says that a plot was then hatched to frighten Scott into silence, and that Thorpe knew about it. Holmes contacted a business associate, John Le Mesurier, who recalls a conversation with Holmes: "David felt that this man Scott ... is just a lunatic and to get rid of him ... would be like getting rid of a mad dog." Le Mesurier was appalled by the suggestion, made by Thorpe's barrister at the trial, that Thorpe's co-defendants might have acted independently of him: "Scott wasn't annoying me ... and he wasn't annoying David. The only person he was causing great distress to, directly, was Jeremy Thorpe."

Through an intermediary, Holmes and Le Mesurier hired Andrew Newton, a domestic airline pilot with a reputation as a maverick. Newton says on camera that Holmes hired him to kill Scott. In a taped telephone conversation, Holmes accepts Newton's fear that they might be

faced by a charge of "conspiracy to bloody ... murder".

It was not the shooting that ended Thorpe's career, however, but the money that paid for it. The original — entirely innocent — source was philanthropist Sir Jack Hayward, now owner of Wolverhampton Wanderers. Hayward donated hundreds of thousands of pounds to the Liberal party. A year before the shooting, Thorpe asked Hayward to settle election expenses through a special route, in the form of two cheques to the unwitting, Jersey-based businessman Nadir Dinshaw. Thorpe used one of these sums to buy Scott's letters. It was this misuse of party funds that caused David Steel to demand Newton's resignation.

Newton's trial in March 1976 for the shooting allowed the press to report Scott's allegations. In May, Thorpe resigned the leadership. When, in October 1977, Newton told his story of having been hired to kill Scott, the Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Thomas Hetherington, ordered the police to reopen their investigation. On August 2, 1978, Thorpe was arrested and charged.

Thorpe had always relied upon his friends. Now he called Nadir Dinshaw and told the Asian-born British citizen that unless he lied to the police about the money arrangements, he might be asked to "move on". Dinshaw understood this to mean that he would be deported. He was innocent of any impropriety and refused to lie, but was breathless: "I felt intensely sad. Basically it was a revelation to me that he had something to hide." Having alienated his friend Bessell, Thorpe also tried unsuccessfully to prevent his return to Britain as the main prosecution witness.

At the trial, which began on 8 May 1979, Bessell told the court that as early as 1968 Thorpe had talked about having Scott killed. The idea had come to nothing, but seven years later Bessell spoke to Holmes when the idea of murder resurfaced. Holmes confessed that he had hired Newton to kill Scott. Bessell's credibility was undermined, because he had signed a newspaper contract which doubled payment in the event of a prosecution: the defence tore him apart. But a member of the

defence team now thinks this was unfair. Gereth Williams QC now comments that he found Bessell's evidence "curiously impressive", that it was unaffected by the newspaper contract and that Bessell "had genuinely come there to do his best to tell the truth".

Newton and Scott, the other two prosecution witnesses, were also heavily undermined. The judge dismissed Newton as a "chump". But new admissions suggest that Newton knew exactly what he was doing in his testimony, that his evidence would help the defence. Le Mesurier now says that Newton promised to "sort things out" in his Old Bailey testimony. Newton duly reduced the courtroom to laughter with a series of ludicrous responses under cross-examination, claiming CIA involvement in the affair and hurling his papers in the air.

Although Thorpe was acquitted, the trial mined him and he never regained a position in public life. His political exile has been further tormented by Parkinson's disease, diagnosed shortly after the trial when Thorpe was in his mid-50s. His booming voice and theatrical demeanour have shrunk away. He lives in London and Devon with his wife Marion. He was invited to participate in the film, but declined due to ill health.

What lessons can be drawn from this strange tale? Scott pursued his vendetta with such bitterness that it is at least partially comprehensible that Thorpe's friends might have wished to obtain his silence. It seems most unlikely that a homosexual party leader, even of the Liberal party, could have come out 20 years ago and survived. But it was not society that destroyed Thorpe — on the contrary, conservative social attitudes and the court's regard for Thorpe's social and political position did much to save him. Thorpe was destroyed by his own vanity. He was reckless. He relied heavily on his friends, but did not then honour them.

Yet he emerges as a charming and magnetic figure. Thorpe was brilliantly witty, often thoughtful and kind, and was that rare politician who made politics exciting. In his fallen humanity, his story resonates with pathos on a classical scale.

The writer is assistant producer of *'Secret Lives: Jeremy Thorpe'*. To be broadcast at 9pm, Monday, 18 November, Channel 4.



Accused, accuser and victim (clockwise from above left): the dandy, Jeremy Thorpe; the alleged intended victim, Norman Scott; the gunman, Andrew Newton; and Rinka, Scott's dog shot by Newton

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Opera Week — and a bit of jazz on the side



Miles Kington

This week, on Radio 3, has been Jazz Week. Hooray, I hear you all cry. Lots and lots of jolly jazz on Radio 3! Hours and hours of super syncope. At last a sign that Nicholas Kenyon, the stern head of dear old Radio 3, has unshed to dear old jazz.

about him. Not eight major errors in the programme.

Eight major errors in one 133-word paragraph, which included the presenter announcing one record and playing another, without anyone noticing that this had happened.

Nobody from Radio 3 wrote to contradict me, least of all to say sorry, so I take it that my count of eight major errors was correct. And if Nicholas Kenyon's crew can make so many errors about one jazz musician in one paragraph, just imagine how many major errors they can make in a Jazz Week!

Imagine the scope for wonderful mistakes in a seven-day period of jazz broadcasts.

But hold on. Let us look more closely at this "Jazz Week". Let us count up carefully the hours of broadcasting devoted to jazz on Radio 3 this week; the programme hours decorated by Radio 3 with the proud strapline JAZZ WEEK.

Hmmm. I make it a total of 940 minutes, which is to say about 16 hours. Sixteen hours of jazz. Well, that's not

bad, considering that our usual ration consists of nothing but the occasional concert recorded by the tireless Derek Drescher, backed up by *Jazz Record Requests* on Saturday. Oh, and that programme that nobody listens to because it's far too late, *Jazz Notes*, at 00.30 hours (and which can be rather annoying waiting up for because they tend to change the announced contents).

Hold on a moment, though. They have marked *Jazz Record Requests* as part of JAZZ WEEK. What a cheek. The programme would be there anyway — it is broadcast every week, year in, year out (except when, as recently, it is cancelled to make way for live Wagner).

Nothing special about *Jazz Record Requests*. You can't call it part of JAZZ WEEK. And they have earmarked *Jazz Notes* as part of JAZZ WEEK. Oh, come on, fellows! *Jazz Notes* goes out the whole time, even if all the listeners are asleep. Subtract *Jazz Notes* and *Jazz Record Requests* from the total, and we get a less impressive 13 hours or so.

Of that 13 hours, another hour and a quarter is given to Radio 3's daily 0-level session, *Music Machine*, in which Wynon Marshall is talking to Natalie Whelan about how to get started in jazz and how to hush on "Happy Birthday" — not exactly designed to attract the average jazz fan. Included in this 13-hour total also are a chat with conductor Andrew Litton on what jazz records he likes (big deal) and a 45-minute programme called *Voices* which is a rag-bag of records by jazz singers. Well, I am not going to haggle, but if you count the genuine concert jazz performances going out this week which would not otherwise go out were it not for Jazz Week, I make it between eight and nine hours of solid music. All the rest is somewhat pointless chat, repeats or programmes that would go out anyway. Make it 10 hours, to be generous.

During the same period no fewer than 14 hours of opera are broadcast. I know, because I have just gone through the *Radio Times*, tediously adding it up.

To put it another way, during the "special" Jazz Week, more opera than jazz is being put out on Radio 3. This is partly because this week's composers, Cherubini and Spontini, are opera composers, which does bump up the total, but mostly because every week on Radio 3 is Opera Week. You have to designate a week Jazz Week to get eight or nine hours of music (just over an hour a day!) but with no effort at all, you can get 14 hours of opera.

It's not a proper Jazz Week, even when you print JAZZ WEEK in capitals, and flexible slots like *Music Machine* and *In Time* are lent to jazz for one week only in order to make the figures look better.

It still doesn't add up to a jazz week, Mr Kenyon. You don't fool me, sir, even if you fool yourself. And I won't feel much different until you have a real Jazz Week or, even better, give instructions for *Jazz Notes* to be broadcast at a time when people are awake. Or, better still, until you cancel some Wagner to make way for jazz.

The sinister sound of democracy trickling away

Sometimes democracy seems perilously fragile. It may not be overturned by coups or dictators, but it may seep away from us, power leached away towards the great multinational corporations.

Yesterday the European Parliament debated a lengthy series of proposed amendments to an existing directive called *Television Without Frontiers*. The amendments sought to regulate the mushrooming unregulated world of cross-border television to ensure higher standards and free access to all.

The most important issue was to guarantee that all broadcasters carry a quota of European programming, ensuring a measure of European cultural independence and giving a huge boost to the European film and television industry. The current directive says that 51 per cent of all screen time should be given to programmes made in Europe. But Britain managed to get added the weasel words "where practicable", which means that each country can decide who should and who should not obey it. The amendment proposed making it compulsory for all. Yesterday that amendment, along with others designed to raise standards, fell.

The French government imposed the quota on all its broadcasters, including Canal Plus, while the British Government uses the "where practicable" get-out to exempt all satellite and cable broadcasters.

The quota amendment was supported by Labour but vigorously opposed by the Government, which mounted a ferocious lobbying campaign claiming that "inflexible mandatory quotas restrict the development of new broadcasters, viewer choice and the essential programming freedom of broadcasters."

Why are they so adamant? Because the British broadcaster it would affect most drastically would be Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB. If it had passed he could still have put out his soap channel, for instance, which is 100 per cent American programming, but he would have been obliged to spend 25 per cent of his overall non-sport and news programme budget on European-made programmes. It would have had no effect on BBC, ITV or Channel 4 as they all obey our national rules for terrestrial television and all greatly exceed the quota that was being proposed for Europe. One rule for terrestrial broadcasters, almost none for Murdoch, seems to be our policy.

Jack Lang, the French MEP, complained bitterly: "Once again the European Parliament had the chance to justify its existence. But it bowed down before conservative forces. The majority of European leaders have agreed to deliver to future generations a television bombardment of US series. I trust they will not come back and cry crocodile tears about the lost European soul."

Two of the strongest campaigners for stricter



Polly Toynbee

The European Parliament is failing to protect democracy against powerful and greedy media moguls

controls were Labour MEPs Carol Tongue and the distinguished ex-broadcaster Philip Whitehead. Deeply depressed by the vote, he said: "What I have seen today is the colossal resources of the multinationals pitted against Members of Parliament and all the European consumer and artistic interests who operate on a wing and a prayer."

The spectacle in the European Parliament in the last couple of days has been extraordinary. All the world communications giants, all those with their snouts in the great European broadcasting trough, were there, leaning, lobbying, paying, threatening. Some, like Italy's Berlusconi, actually have their own staff as MEPs. Those with media empires used their newspaper clout to intimidate politicians.

There was the full might of the American administration, promoting the interests of its movie and television industry. Bertelsmann, Kirch, Murdoch, Turner, Reuters, British Telecom, Sony, Microsoft, Deutsche TV – the list is endless. All the big global players had their lobbyists there. They were ensuring that the soon-to-arrive "video-on-demand" services would not be counted as broadcasters at all, and thus would escape the same regulation as other broadcasters. And, not surprisingly, it worked. Although the majority of MEPs resisted their handiwork, not enough turned up to reach the required large majority, and so the "free market" won.

But what is a cultural free market? When buying second-hand American television programmes costs 10 per cent of the price of new, European-originated material, where is the level playing field? In 1994 European broadcasters had a deficit of \$4bn in imports of American programmes. By this year it has galloped ahead to \$6.3bn on the balance of trade. Cultural and commercial interests go hand in hand – an estimated three-quarters of a million European jobs are lost in that cultural deficit to America. In two years the Americans have increased their penetration of the European broadcasting market by 14.5 per cent. What is the point of a common market if it does not include those things most important to our cultural and trading interests?

Other important amendments failed – but one did succeed, preventing sports events such as the World Cup from falling into the exclusive hands of pay-per-view monopolists. Well, at least they didn't dare let the free market interfere with football.

All this raises a bigger and more alarming issue. It shows how, hidden away in Europe, crucially important issues are fixed by the sheer mega-power of conglomerates, against consumer interests. Next week the Government will publish its long-delayed regulations on the future of digital broadcasting, which will show whether they are prepared to sell the digital future to Murdoch. The arguments are not good.

A little hypocrisy is good for us all

by Andrew Marr

Not everything synthetic is bad. Political outrage over the David Willetts affair – the attempted subversion by government whips of a committee charged with overseeing MPs' behaviour – is largely synthetic. The Commons is being undermined all the time, and all MPs know it. It is less effectively self-regulating than the average schoolboys' gang. But thank God for the outrage anyway.

Questions are fired on a daily basis. Independent spirits are nobbled or bought off. We know about cash for questions – the subversion of representative democracy from outside. But what about its internal variants, such as knighthoods for silence? Committee places in return for daily loyal BBC radio interviews? Or Parliamentary Under-Secretaryships for helpful tips? It goes on. It is rarely committed to paper (silly Willy) but accomplished through nods, hidden conversations and reassuring elbow-squeezes in the Members' Lobby. There is a case for saying that this staining of parliamentary purity has to happen.

These governmental baubles and cod-medieval vanities are the equivalent in the 1990s to the hollow but remunerative Crown offices given to "placemen" in the 1790s. A truly independent and unruly legislature would, so this argument goes, make it so difficult for the ruling party to be sure of getting its business done that the laws promised during elections would not be enacted.

Without sticks and carrots, there would be no effective whipping. Without whipping, there would be no stable parliamentary parties. Without parties, representative democracy would be impossible.

Then what? Ministers, insecure in their jobs, would have to spend so much time cajoling other MPs that their Whitehall offices would be run without them.

If you accept that argument then you have to concede that Mr Willetts and Andrew Mitchell were not subverting the real constitution, based on ministerial power, but were in fact acting as its true guardians.

Let us push this to its logical conclusion. Without their kind – the Dyno-rod operatives of British politics – Westminster would seize up. Just as diplomats are sent abroad to lie for their country, whips are obliged to do the same thing by the banks of the Thames – dirty work. Carruthers, but someone



The David Willetts affair showed how far the Government will go to get its way in the House. And democracy is the richer for it

has to do it. This would happen under Labour too.

Why then all the fuss? Is it merely that Quentin Davies, the Tory backbencher who gave Willetts such a tough time, is a disappointed man – and that Dale Campbell-Savours, the leading Labour inquisitor, is a natural born troublemaker?

Davies is certainly a staunch pro-European, who hadly wanted to be a minister but didn't win the kind of promotion Willetts did; he was the only Tory MP to vote against the government line on the Scott Report debate; and he is now the reprobating BBC/TIN standstill "pro-Brussels" Tory. Indeed,

the mere fact that Davies is on the standards and privileges committee refutes any notion of an all-powerful whips' office.

Well, there are no pure motives in politics. But if you are tempted by the argument as laid out so far, try to imagine it being defended in public by any Conservative MP – not in general terms, which is hard enough, but in the specifics of the cash-for-questions affair.

It would have to run something like this: "One of my colleagues, Neil Hamilton, took money from a businessman to ask questions in Parliament. This was a bad business, though hardly unique. A

newspaper got hold of the story, because the business feller sneaked. It was going to be very embarrassing for the PM. So the Government decided to hide it from you by privately fixing a committee.

"That committee pretends to be staunchly independent – just as I do – but really, of course, most of us are trying to make our way in the world. So the chats between the whips and some of its members went on. Then, dammit, these also became public because Willetts wrote a note, which was passed to *The Guardian* ahead of court proceedings. So then another committee had to sit, and pre-

tend to be cross. Naughty Willetts! In fact, of course, we are all on his side. This 'sovereignty of Parliament' business is a bit of sham. We hang on about it when we are having a go about Europe. But none of us takes it seriously."

Such appalling frankness is impossible to imagine. The most cynical MP could not openly admit that keeping in with the Government and its whips matters more than defending Parliament's independence. There is still some residual belief in the honour of the House – a corporate sense of shame. While that is true, there is hope.

So what now? There is no point in issuing journalistic edicts against sin and in favour of political chastity. Whatever the rulebook says, there will be party whipping, and where there is whipping, there will be unsavoury conversations, deals and private offers. Always. Put a microphone above the urinals and a journalist in every broom cupboard – and you still would not stamp it out.

That's politics. But having politics, however grimy round the edges, is vastly better than not having politics. It is important not to let the perfect be the enemy of the tolerable. The Commons can still hold the line against excessive government intrusion by pouncing and expressing anger whenever a minister is caught out, and demanding sanctions, including suspension. (This would wipe out the current Government's majority, but that is not so great an issue as it might seem: the Ulster Unionists will support them for the time being.)

It could go further than it has in the past. If MPs are really worried about their sliding public image, then they need to restore their indignation about being put upon and lied to by Powers smooth servants. Where a Quentin Davies and a Dale Campbell-Savours have led, many more can follow; and they would be doing Parliament itself a service. Now, you may say, this proposed angry reassertion of its formal rules would be more than synthetic – it would be hypocritical. So am I advocating hypocrisy?

Yes, indeed. Without a little of the grease of hypocrisy, no system of representative democracy can function. This week's events add up to an exercise in necessary hypocrisy. It helps to police the narrow line between the Government fighting in the Commons to get its way and the Government treating the Commons with contempt. It is, in short, an excellent show-trial.

New Labour, new lads

Read his lips. Women have little place in Tony Blair's language

Last week I said that Tony Blair had women problems that needed more than a quick makeover to be resolved. He and his team need to listen to women as well as talk to them. They also need to listen to themselves. Actions may speak louder than words but words are all a politician like Blair has until he gets into power, so he should choose them carefully.

Clearly all politicians think about women if they are addressing what are obviously "women's events", but when called upon to speak to the public at large, do they bother to think about the language and imagery that they use? Who have they in mind when they are penning their speeches? How conscious are they of the need to address all of the population? Do they ever wonder why so many women feel that politics isn't "about them", that it is an irrelevance full of macho game-playing?

For those unaware of this bias, Shalagh Diplock of the Fawcett Society has done something very simple and very effective. She has analysed the three keynote speeches from this year's party conferences for their gender balance. These speeches are written under great pressure, but they are approved by aides and leaders before being presented.

We know that Paddy Ashdown was lobbied at the Liberal Democrats conference in an effort to persuade him to address women's concerns in his speech. The result of Diplock's analysis does not bode well for Blair and all those apologists who tell us that new Labour is doing enough to impress female voters.

The Fawcett Society has been campaigning for equality between women and men since 1866. Its report looks at the use of specifically gendered words such as father, hero, serviceman, businessman, mother, suffragette, widow, sportswomen. It also analyses the number of references to named male and female individuals.



Suzanne Moore

Paddy Ashdown used 30 words that referred specifically to men and 32 to women. He named 11 men, from Adolf Hitler to Brian Mawhinney, and five women. John Major used 52 words that referred to men and 22 to women. He named 14 men and three women. Tony Blair comes off worst. He used 74 words that refer specifically to men and only eight that refer to women. He named 22 men – John Smith, Neil Kinnock, John Prescott, Gordon Brown, David Blunkett, Jack Straw, Chris Smith, Robin Cook, John Major, Michael Heseltine, Joseph Stalin, Kim Il Sung, Neil Hamilton, Ken Clarke, Matthew Harding, Dennis Stevenson, Bob Hughes, Nelson Mandela, Clement Attlee, Alan Howard, William Wilberforce and Adolf Hitler. He chose to name just three women – Aung San Suu Kyi, Joan Lester and Glenys Kinnock.

Blair started his speech with references to the millennium, to new technology and the "marvels of science" outlining a new "age of achievement" for all. Yet the anecdotes and references were largely about men – the man cleaning his Sierra, the aspirant of miners and their sons, a JCB excavator plant with a male boss and an engineering firm. In the final images of his speech he

attempted to link new Labour with the broad sweep of human history. He mentioned the Old Testament prophets, Wilberforce, the trade union movement, Jack Jones fighting in the Spanish Civil War, the defeat of Hitler and the post-war building of the welfare state.

No women were mentioned – are there no women worth mentioning? – and he emphasised the outstanding British quality of "courage" and "physical bravery". He ended with a modified chant from the terraces: "Labour's coming home" to encourage us to identify with his project.

It is not the case, of course, that women cannot like football or indeed cannot be moved by a narrative of heroic struggle. But the huge problem of our distrust of politicians is reflected in the large numbers of men and women who won't even bother to vote. If we do not see our own lives reflected in the words of politicians, every pronouncement becomes increasingly meaningless. If they can't talk the talk, how can we be expected to believe that they will walk the walk.

It is a poor state of affairs when Blair appears to be more gender-blind in this respect than Major or Ashdown, who was making a deliberate effort to speak to women despite playing up his soldier image. Blair's gender-blindness may be the result of immense strain but it is at times of stress that unconscious assumptions come to the surface. The assumption that male members of the shadow cabinet are more important than female, that everyone shared in Euro 96 fever, that he does not have to come up with examples and anecdotes that illustrate female as well as male experience, means that he is walking straight into a blind spot that is proving as slippery as it is dangerous. If we are to be included rather than excluded then, instead of watching so much football, he and his "team-mates" might start watching their language.

How does your garden vac?

Margaret has a secret but it's the kind that everyone already seems to know. "I'm the phantom lawn mower," she says proudly. This means that, when her neighbour is away, she runs over and mows his scruffy lawn. "He should be grateful. It was about knee high, you know," said another neighbour with heavy approval.

"Isn't that illegal?" My question is ignored as the discussion returns to the irritation – nay, the agony! – at having to look at a neighbour's long grass. Love thy neighbour but not his lawn is their view: a Good Samaritan is not afraid to mow.

Margaret is American but she could be British. The whippers here also reveal similar secret mowing missions. You can see their point of view. Their gardens are perfect. Marigolds march in military lines. Roses fear to drop a petal. The grass looks like photosynthesised velvet (it's amazing what you can do with electric nail scissors these days). The edges are so abrupt that insects and errant burrowers will need motorcycle stunt bikes to cross.

Such perfectionists are aghast at the idea of a neighbour who claims to be creating an environment for nesting hedgehogs or a natterpatch for days of wine and butterflies. Fortunately for all, this spiral of obsession is interrupted by autumn, which is egalitarian enough to mess up to everyone's garden.

But now Mother Nature has met her match. No, it's not God who has intervened. It's garden vac – the "labour-saving" device that blows, sucks and mulches its way through autumn with such drama that a TV mini-series cannot be far behind.

"We effectively invented a new garden care market with the garden vac," says Flynn's marketing manager, Andrew Mackay. Before Flynn launched its first garden vac in 1993 only 5,000 were sold in Britain. "Now it's in excess of 100,000 per year and that's worth £10m to £12m. This is our peak season – some 60 per cent are sold in October and November."

Down at the DIY shop many of these things are labelled in a way that might attract Arnold Schwarzenegger on a dangerous day for dahlias. The Flynn petrol-powered Blowervac (£99.99) looks like a lethal weapon, while one Black & Decker number claims to blow up to 180mph. There is much talk of "high impact" and "top velocity". The "Leaf-Buster" is so impressive that it will no doubt need a high-protein diet and its very own garden shed.

The claim is that the garden vac is the easiest way to tidy "the outside of your home". Call me paranoid but this use of words is worrying: could it signal a plot to make the garden an extension of our front rooms? Such tidiness will require constant strimming, vacating and clipping. The real give-away is the use of the word "labour-saving". Every housewife (and husband) knows this is a ploy to get us to raise our standards, clean more and therefore buy more products. Our homes are full of labour-saving devices and we have less leisure time than ever before.

This is all bad news for your common-or-garden hedgehog: there is no room for common nature when your garden is blow-dried. Margaret would not allow such a thing.

Ann Treneman

Good-bye battery



Welcome to the future: Seiko Kinetic®, the first quartz watch that turns your movement into power. Every move you make is converted into electrical impulses by a tiny built-in powerhouse. Ecological, reliable and efficient: wear it one day to gain energy for at least two weeks. Wear it daily – it will run continually. Made of titanium: light, yet strong and kind to your skin. 20 bar water resistant. One-way rotating bezel and screw lock crown. Seiko Kinetic – it's built to last. Someday all watches will be made this way.

SEIKO KINETIC

Seiko Kinetic at: <http://www.seiko-corp.co.jp>

Paula Hinton

Philip Graham

Emmanuel Cooper

Alexander d'Arbeloff, entrepreneur, died London 30 October, aged 101. An associate of Abel Gance in the 1920s, he made films, wrote novels and organised Paraguay's new road system in the 1930s.

Paul Magrath, Barrister



Births, Marriages & Deaths

DEATHS

For Garrett BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS, please telephone 0171-293 2011 or fax to 0171-293 2010.

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

Changing of the Guard

The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment receives the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, Jan.

Birthdays

Anniversaries

Universities

Anniversaries
Births: St Augustine of Hippo, 354; Edward III, King of England, 1312; General Sir John Moore, 1761; Edward John Trelawny, writer and traveller, 1792; Henry Braxley Richards, pianist and composer, 1819; Charles Frederick Wooten, couturier, 1825; James Clerk Maxwell, physicist, 1831; Edwin Thomas Balfour, actor, 1833; Robert Louis Stevenson, author, writer and traveller, 1850; John Drew, actor, 1853; George Whitefield Chadwick, composer, 1854; Eugene Ionesco, author and playwright, 1912.
Deaths: Pope St Nicholas the Great, 867; Malcolm III, King of the Scots, killed 1093; Prince Henry the Navigator, 1460; Ludovico Carracci, painter, 1619; George Sale, Orientalist and translator of the Koran

1736; William

NOTE.

Lectures

Tate Gallery: Sacha Craddock, "The Turner Prize", 1pm.
National Portrait Gallery, Royal Society Science Lecture: Dr Jim Bennett, "Sir Christopher Wren", 1.10pm.

Luncheons

Dinners

Councils, were also present.

Councils, were also

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Mr Malcolm Rifkind QC MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, was host of a dinner held yesterday evening at 1 Carlton Gardens, London SW1, in honour of Mr Bahadur Deuba, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Nepal, and Mrs Deuba.

and Mrs Della.

Royal Society
Dr Anne McLaren, Foreign Secretary of the Royal Society, chaired the Claude Bernard Lecture yesterday evening at the Royal Society, 6 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1. Dr Claude Debru of the Université Louis Pasteur gave the lecture, entitled "On the Usefulness of the History of Science for Scientific Education".

Damages assumed to be prudently invested

LAW REPORT

13 November 1996

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 277: 1039-1043.

In the second, Mr Justice Collins on 7 November 1995 had awarded James Thomas,

Lord Justice Hirst said that in these three cases the multiplier applied to the annual amount assessed for future losses and expenses (the mil-

The assumption in cases involving large awards was that the plaintiff would seek advice as to the ways in which the money could best be managed, and that there would be a normal spread of investments. A discount rate of 4 to 5 per cent had become established.

In 1994 a working party chaired by Sir Michael Ogden QC issued a report entitled *Actuarial Tables with explanatory notes for use in personal injury*



Congo

100 Largest Insurance Funds

State	Ref	Inst	Stock	Bond	Ref	Inst	Stock	Bond
Albany Equity Sec 2	5067	2803	Black & Co General Mgmt Acctm	9617	5079			
Albany Equity Sec 3	5068	2803	Black & Co General Mgmt Acctm	9617	5079			
Albany Municipal Bond	7109	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7110	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7111	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7112	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7113	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7114	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7115	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7116	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7117	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7118	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7119	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7120	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7121	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7122	3463	London Equity	10240				
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Albany Municipal Bond	7126	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7127	3463	London Equity	10240				
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Albany Municipal Bond	7130	3463	London Equity	10240				
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Albany Municipal Bond	7197	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7198	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7199	3463	London Equity	10240				
Albany Municipal Bond	7200	3463	London Equity	10240				

business & city

Business news desk: tel 0171-293 2636 fax 0171-293 2098
BUSINESS & CITY EDITOR: JEREMY WARNER

Nationwide signals end to mortgage war

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

One million homeowners will have to pay more for their mortgages from next month, following a decision yesterday by Nationwide Building Society to raise its standard lending rate by 0.25 per cent. The move signalled the first retreat in the mortgage war as the housing market recovers.

But the Nationwide opened up the competition on another front by raising the rates it pays to savers in a bid to win deposits next year from the building societies planning to convert to banks.

Other lenders said yesterday that they had no plans yet to raise mortgage rates. Nationwide will still have one of the lowest variable rates on offer, at 6.74 per cent, as part of its policy of demonstrating the benefits of mutualism.

Philip Williamson, commercial director, said: "We have been looking after our million borrowers and now we want to look after the 6 million savers

a bit more." He said the society remained committed to returning £30m of profits to its members.

He pointed out that many savers locked into accounts with building societies planning to join the stock market would be able to move their investments during the next few months. Tens of billions of pounds worth of deposits are held in accounts qualifying for free shares at societies such as Halifax and Woolwich which are converting to banks next year.

Nationwide's mortgage increase will add just under £7 to the monthly cost of a £50,000 repayment mortgage, although at £362.03 this will remain about £7 below the monthly payment charged by lenders such as Halifax or Barclays.

It plans to increase rates on a range of savings accounts by 0.1 to 0.3 per cent.

Other societies said they did not plan to raise their own mortgage and savings rates immediately. Birmingham Midshires last week raised its

mortgage rate by a quarter-point to 7.24 per cent.

"We have no plans at present to change although obviously we will have to remain competitive," a spokesman for the Woolwich said.

An Alliance and Leicester spokeswoman agreed: "Holding shares will give our members another stake in the organisation," she added.

David Chaffin, a spokesman for the determinedly mutual

Skipton Building Society, said that although the Nationwide remained a good flagship for the sector, it was competing on two fronts. "They are playing in the mutual league, where some smaller societies are very ag-

gressive on savings rates, and in the size league, where they are taking on the biggest mortgage lenders," he said.

Rob Thomas, building societies analyst at City bank UBS, said Nationwide had been out

on a limb before yesterday's move. "It marks a recognition that the benefits of mutualism only go so far," he said.

Mr Thomas suggested that Nationwide might have been having difficulty attracting

enough deposits in the light of growing mortgage demand. Its move follows the quarter-point increase in base rates to 6 per cent a fortnight ago.

Other lenders admit that they are likely to increase their mortgage rates if base rates rise again, but Mr Williamson said Nationwide would not necessarily do so.

Gary Marsh, director of strategy at Halifax, said another rise in base rates would make a mortgage increase more likely. But he denied this would halt the housing market recovery.

"One of the dangers in the housing market is of too sharp a recovery. In a sense we welcomed the psychological impact of the Chancellor's last move because what we want is a steady, sustainable recovery."

Official figures yesterday brought further evidence of the recovery. New housebuilding orders rose for the third quarter rising in July-September - up 2 per cent on the previous quarter and 7 per cent on the same period a year ago.

£100 savings to generate windfall

Savers with the Woolwich and Halifax building societies will need to make sure they have a minimum balance in their accounts by the end of this year in order to make sure they do not miss out on their free shares when the two join the stock market next year, writes Diane Coyle.

Woolwich said yesterday that in order to qualify for the flat rate dividend, likely to be worth £750, members would need to have a balance of at least £100 in qualifying accounts at midnight on 31 December. This would entitle them to vote at a special general meeting in February.

John Stewart, Woolwich group chief executive, said: "The Christmas period can be a busy one financially and I hope that this information will help members plan the use of their savings."

Savers would also need to have had £100 in a qualifying account on 31 December last year. People who had at least £1,000 in their account on that date and who still have that amount at the time of the special general meeting will receive a variable payment in proportion to the size of their balance.

The society said the special meeting was expected to be held in February and larger

savers would be given 21 days' notice to top up their accounts back to the level they were at on 31 December 1995 in order to increase the size of their share dividend.

Halifax will write to members with details of its requirements within the next two to three weeks.

In order to be eligible to vote at its February special meeting, savers will need to restore the balance in their accounts back to the December 1994 level.

That was when the news of the society's merger with Leeds Building Society and planned flotation first emerged.



Biggest and best lenders

British Gas abandons £1bn claim

Michael Harrison
and Chris Godsmark

British Gas suffered a double blow yesterday as it abandoned a £1bn compensation claim against the Government and a top executive in its pipeline business, TransCo, was forced to resign because of ill-health.

The company said it had dropped its legal action against the Department of Trade and Industry for repayment of Gas Levy because it was satisfied the tax had been applied correctly.

The news came as TransCo announced that its managing director, Harry Moulson, had retired with immediate effect for health reasons. Mr Moulson has played a key role in preparing the business for demerger from British Gas's trading arm. He was also involved in TransCo's decision to take its prices dispute with the industry regulator, Ofgas, to the MMC.

The climb-down on the Gas Levy claim prompted immediate speculation that British Gas was close to a breakthrough in negotiations with North Sea oil companies over its £400m take-or-pay contracts. When British Gas issued its writ against the DTI for refund of Gas Levy the DTI immediately counter-sued, issuing "protective writs" against 27 oil and gas companies in case the claim went against it. In response the DTI yesterday also dropped its legal action.

Several of the oil companies named in the DTI writs had been preparing their own counter-claim against British Gas, arguing that liability for the contracts could be passed back. One of these firms, Lamsco, welcomed the news.

Although British Gas has consistently denied that its legal action was linked to the take-or-pay negotiations, it was widely interpreted as a manoeuvre to put pressure on the oil companies to reach a deal. There is mounting speculation that British Gas Energy, which will inherit the take-or-pay liabilities on demerger, is near to a deal on renegotiating up to a quarter of the contracts.

The deal is likely to involve British Gas auctioning off some of its interest in the Morecambe Bay gas field off the north-west coast. British Gas contracted to buy the gas from North Sea suppliers at prices of around 20p a therm compared with spot prices of under 10p earlier this year.

The take-or-pay problem has been considerably eased in recent months by a strengthening of spot prices to between 14p and 17p depending on the delivery date. The writ related to 24 old supply contracts between British Gas and North Sea oil companies covering eight gas fields on which it claimed it had overpaid Gas Levy, a tax of 4p a therm introduced in 1981.



Declining a seductive option: Tony Hales (left) and Sir Christopher Hogg disappointed the City.

Allied Domecq disappointed the City yesterday by ruling out a demerger of its Beehive gin to Ballantine's whisky spirits arm from its pub and fast food retailing operations. Investors had hoped new chairman Sir Christopher Hogg would treat Allied to a re-run of his successful break-up of Courtaulds in 1990, writes Tom Stevenson.

Spelling out the reasons for shunning what Sir Christopher called the "seductive option", he made clear that Allied's current management, especially Tony Hales, chief executive, was under notice to improve the per-

City glum as Allied rules out demerger

formance of the group or make way for others to do the job. Assessing the ability of Allied's executives was, he said yesterday, his biggest challenge.

He was speaking as Allied Domecq announced an 11 per cent fall in pre-exceptional profits as de-stocking in the US hit its more important spirits op-

eration. Despite expectations that it would be cut, the full-year dividend was maintained at 23.6p but the shares closed 14p lower at 454p as shareholders gave up hope of quickly realising Allied's estimated break-up value of about £50p.

Sir Christopher said Allied was "a fine group with good as-

sets - human, tangible and intangible. But it must improve the returns it delivers to shareholders. A huge amount of restructuring is behind us and the major internal reorganisations on both sides of the group are facilitating real improvements in performance."

He added that he had resisted the temptation to bow to considerable pressure from investing institutions that had started to view demerger as a panacea for Allied's problems because the cost would be unacceptable.

Investment column, page 19

AXA and UAP merger creates £5.3bn giant

Jill Treanor
Banking Correspondent

AXA and Union des Assurances de Paris, two French insurers, stunned European stock markets yesterday by announcing plans for a Fr45.1bn (£5.3bn) merger that would create the world's second-largest insurance company after Nippon Life of Japan.

In terms of assets under management, however, the combined group will be the world's largest insurer.

AXA has Fr1,550bn of assets under management while UAP has Fr743bn.

"It's an industry-shaking move with enormous ramifications for the European insurance industry," said Charles Landa, an insurance analyst at Société Générale Strauss Thornhill. "It's got to lead to further consolidation."

In the UK the merger will make the group the country's third-largest life insurer as AXA owns AXA Equity & Law and UAP owns 60 per cent of Sun Life. Under the terms of the deal AXA, Europe's third-largest insurer, is in effect taking over its larger rival UAP, which was privatised in 1994.

Analysts predict numerous benefits for UAP, which lost money last year but returned to profit in the first half of 1996. UAP, a regular target for bid speculation after its losses last year and depressed share price, has seen its shares rise 14.3 per cent since late last month. Its shares were suspended

yesterday at Fr116.9 francs. "There have been plenty of rumours about UAP but they had all been discounted," said one analyst. Dealings in AXA's shares were also suspended yesterday with the price at Fr18.5 francs.

News of the merger sent shares in other UK insurance companies higher amid expectations that the deal would prompt further mergers among insurance companies. "There has been a general trend towards consolidation but this will quicken the process," one analyst said.

Shares in Legal & General ended 7.5 p higher at 332.5 p, while Prudential's shares rose 8p to 457p. Sun Life closed at 243.5, up 5.5p.

AXA and UAP said they would capitalise on their complementary businesses and geographical presence. The combined group will become the number one insurer in France and the insurers said they would rank among the leaders in the UK, Belgium, Germany and Spain. The deal will increase their presence in Italy and the Netherlands.

UAP shareholders will receive 10 UAP shares for four AXA shares plus four "certificates of guaranteed value".

If AXA's shares are below Fr392.50 in June 1999, the certificates entitle holders to receive the difference between that and the market price. The certificates can pay no more than Fr 80 per certificate, or Fr32 per UAP share.

Pubs chief could walk away with £850,000



Mark McQuater: Will not be replaced at Wetherspoon

Tom Stevenson
City Editor

The managing director of the fast growing pub chain JD Wetherspoon is set to walk away with more than £850,000 following his unexpected resignation yesterday "to pursue other interests".

Brought in only two and half years ago after a banking career at NatWest, Mark McQuater is still negotiating his severance package but it promises to be even bigger than the £540,000 pay-off secured earlier this week by Francis Baron, who pocketed two years pay after being ousted from First Choice, the holidays group.

Tim Martin, executive chair-

man of Wetherspoon and the driving force of the successful pub chain he founded, insisted yesterday there had been no falling out between the two. But Mr McQuater will not be replaced and doubts have been raised over Mr Martin's ability to delegate responsibility in a group he still dominates.

Mr McQuater earned £134,400 according to Wetherspoon's latest report and accounts and was employed on a 12 month rolling contract which it is understood the company will pay out in full. He also holds 90,000 options over shares at an average exercise price of about 40p compared to yesterday's close of 121.5p.

Exercising those options would net Mr McQuater £720,000, taking his total severance package to over £850,000.

The role of managing director will now be absorbed by the existing executive team. Mr Martin said the company would review the position of managing director again within the next year.

News of the bumper pay-offs from two relatively small companies is certain to irritate investors, although Mr McQuater's package has the merit of being largely a reflection of the dramatic appreciation of Wetherspoon's share price in recent years. Mr Baron's pay-off, which followed

a halving of First Choice's share price during his tenure, was viewed as another example of "payment for failure".

JD Wetherspoon has been one of the most successful of the fast-growing managed pub groups spawned by the beer orders of 1989 which attempted to ease the stranglehold of the big brewers on the pubs they supplied. It has flourished by offering completely music-free pubs, serving good cask-conditioned beers and all-day food.

Wetherspoon's shares have risen almost tenfold since coming to the market in 1992, making a fortune for Mr Martin, who holds shares worth more than £80m at the current price.

Kingfisher pays £51m for Norweb Retail

Nigel Cope

Kingfisher yesterday moved to expand its Comet chain of electrical superstores when it agreed to pay £51m for Norweb Retail, part of United Utilities. But the deal immediately sparked controversy when union officials said the deal could involve up to 1,000 job losses.

Under the terms of the deal Kingfisher will close Norweb's 57 high street shops, its head office in Bolton and a distribution centre in Worsley. It is also expected that Kingfisher will close up

to half of Norweb's 81 out-of-town superstores due to overlap with existing branches of Comet.

Stephanie Golden, national retail officer of Unison, criticised United Utilities for breaking the news to workers on the same day as organising a separate pre-Budget cocktail party.

"This is a devastating announcement for our members and for Norweb's retail customers," she said. The decision to close the high street network would hit the elderly and the poor as well as those without their own transport.

Kingfisher said Norweb had intended to close the high street stores anyway as they were loss-making. All the Norweb stores will trade until after Christmas pending a review, which will be completed in February.

Comet currently has 224 stores and has been keen to expand its out-of-town presence. Buying existing outlets helps get round tougher planning guidelines on out-of-town stores. The Norweb stores will be re-branded under the Comet name. The majority are in the North-west.

STOCK MARKETS									
Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	1996 High	1996 Low	YTD (%)	FTSE 100	Dow Jones	Nikkei
FTSE 100	3914.40	+3.60	+0.1	4073.10	3632.30	4.01	3914.40	8073.10	15852.30
FTSE 250	4395.80	+0.20	+0.0	4568.80	4015.30	3.95	4395.80	8073.10	15852.30
FTSE 350	1954.90	+1.50	+0.1	2022.10	1815.80	3.91	1954.90	8073.10	15852.30
FTSE SmallCap	2159.89	+0.84	+0.0	2244.36	1954.06	3.15	2159.89	8073.10	15852.30
FTSE 100-Share	1930.89	+1.38	+0.1	1994.54	1791.99	3.05	1930.89	8073.10	15852.30
New York	6255.80	+35.79	+0.6	6219.82	6032.94	2.15	6255.80	8073.10	15852.30
Tokyo	21065.96	+35.96	+0.2	22668.80	19734.70	0.76	21065.96	8073.10	15852.30
Hong Kong	12771.86	+20.70	+0.2	12775.47	10204.67	3.28	12771.86	8073.10	15852.30
Frankfurt	2728.32	-11.51	-0.4	2739.83	2253.36	1.72	2728.32	8073.10	15852.30

Statistics as of 12 November

INTEREST RATES									
Short sterling	UK medium gilt	US long bond	Money Market Rates	Bond Yields	1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year	Long bond
UK	6.13	6.81	7.62	7.85	7.78	7.98			
US	5.34	5.58	7.75	5.90	5.95	5.97			
Japan	0.44	0.58	2.75	2.90					
Germany	3.09	3.25	6.89	6.36	6.74				

CURRENCIES									
£/\$	£/DM	£/¥	£/A\$	£/NZ\$	£/HK\$	£/SG\$	£/R\$	£/C\$	£/IN\$
£/\$	1.9493	1.9192	1.5580	0.5074	-0.06	0.8427			
£/DM	1.8500	-0.176	1.8587	0.6068	unch	0.8318			
£/¥	2.4677	-0.014	2.2125	1.4990	-0.007	1.4195			
£/A\$	163.128	-19.387	168.554	111.240	-10.29	101.725			
£/HK\$	90.5	-0.2	83.4	95.0	-0.2	93.8			

PIA suffers further blow as broker quits

The Personal Investment Authority suffered a further blow over the pensions mis-selling scandal yesterday when Denis Brown, an insurance broker, resigned from the regulator's board, writes Jill Treanor.

He has resigned over concerns about the possible invalidation of professional indemnity insurance for independent financial advisers caught up in the scandal - an issue the PIA claimed to have ironed out months ago.

Mr Brown, in his resignation letter, said he was "deeply troubled" about the PIA's attitude

towards forcing members to disclose privileged documents which may invalidate personal indemnity cover.

The PIA, however, said it had taken extensive legal advice on this issue which had concluded that its monitoring arrangements would not invalidate personal indemnity cover.

Separately, the PIA will today issue a progress report on the number of urgent pensions mis-selling cases that have been dealt with. The report is expected to show only a slight improvement on figures leaked last month.



COMMENT

Members of converting building societies will be able to have their cake and eat it – take the windfall handout, keep or sell the shares, then shop around for the best savings rates elsewhere.

One up to the mutuals in the battle for savers

People who save with building societies outnumber mortgage borrowers by more than six to one. So it is small wonder the Nationwide has decided to stage a tactical retreat on the lending front, now that mortgage demand is picking up strongly, in order to concentrate its firepower on attracting savers.

The move is also in part designed to further Nationwide's increasingly lonely defence of the mutual structure of ownership. By raising mortgage rates, Nationwide can offer keener deposit rates. With luck the effect will be to lure back to the mutual tradition savers who are holding their money with rivals right now in order to qualify for free shares. That's the claimed strategy anyway.

The converting societies reply to the argument that the lower profit margin permitted by mutualism will allow higher deposit rates is that their savers will have a different kind of stake. Even if the rates of interest they earn are a shade lower than the rates offered by mutuals, they will have shares that pay dividends and offer capital gains.

This misses the obvious point, however. Members of converting building societies will be able to have their cake and eat it – take the windfall handout, keep or sell the shares, then shop around for the best savings rates elsewhere. Leithargy will probably ensure this does not occur on a grand scale, but at the margin it certainly will. This newspaper and most others have been inundated

with aggrieved Alliance and Leicester depositors threatening to move their money elsewhere as soon as they get their free shares.

Even though yesterday brought the first sign of an easing in the mortgage war, it also emphasised the pressures that the converting societies are going to face. Part of the *raison d'être* for the remaining mutuals will be to cut profit margins in retail banking by giving away to their depositors and borrowers in the shape of more competitive interest rates what converting societies and banks need to pay out in dividends.

The fact that the interest rate cycle has now turned will make matters worse. Mortgage lenders traditionally increase their margins on home loans when the level of base rates is declining. They did so with a vengeance during the housing market slump. But when base rates are rising, building society margins tend to narrow. This is the more so this time round since most building societies are doubly cautious about increasing mortgage rates while the housing market recovery remains so fragile.

All in all, it adds up to a difficult first year for the new pils. A booming housing market will help but whether any of them manage to retain their present market share on either lending or deposits remains open to doubt. For all the Gadarene rush to convert into banks, there is a lesson in the fact that the banks have been losing market share to building societies pretty steadily for years. Mutually owned building societies may have

their drawbacks but they still win hands down over banks in terms of customer satisfaction.

Tokyo has nothing to fear from Big Bang

Mitsuo Mitsuoka, Japan's new finance minister, has chosen to announce the Japanese version of Big Bang, deregulation of financial markets, with this extraordinary incantation: "Now I am designated as commander on the front lines, with arrows and bullets falling around me like rain. If a bullet hits me, I could be injured, or even die. But I accept that". Eat your heart out Eric Cantona.

What Mr Mitsuoka appears to have been saying, loosely translated, is that the proposals are likely to run into sustained opposition from powerful vested interests. As a result the plans are at this stage notably thin on detail and suitably long term (2001). In truth, however, political opponents would be well advised to forget their reservations and back the reforms wholeheartedly, for unless Tokyo changes soon and fast, it will slip so far behind New York and London that it will never catch up.

Tokyo is still one of the top three financial centres in the world, but only by virtue of the size of the domestic economy behind it and the vast capital flows that need to be recycled. Otherwise Tokyo as a financial centre is pretty much still living in the stone age.

As a self standing, internationally competitive organism, it is now so far behind London that the two barely stand comparison.

Fixed commissions reign supreme in securities trading and strictly enforced barriers still exist between securities operations and banks. There are even still some controls on foreign exchange transactions. Like so much else in Japan, Tokyo as a financial centre is a largely protected market place. The big US proprietary trading operations, like parasites on the pig's belly, thrive there, but they remain essentially barred from the inner sanctum.

The lesson of the City is that Tokyo has nothing to fear from deregulation and everything to gain. Weaker institutions will go to the wall, but stronger ones will prosper and grow larger still. Nomura will undoubtedly emerge even more omnipotent than it is already. The foreigners will invade in their herds, but bring capital and expertise with them. Ultimately Tokyo will be the better. All this assumes Mr Mitsuoka is serious, that this is more than hot air to appease foreign critics. But when the seagulls follow the trawler, it is because they think sushi might be thrown into the sea, as Cantona might have said.

British Gas gets it wrong again

Another day, another farce in the affairs of that much loved company, British Gas. This time British Gas has been forced

into an embarrassing climbdown on the legal action it launched against the Government last summer to recover £1.2bn in North Sea gas levies. We don't have a case after all. BG admitted yesterday. Which rather begs the question of why it came to launch such a no-hoper in the first place.

There are three possible answers. The company's own explanation is that it was forced to launch the action last summer because if it didn't it would fall victim in a time block and any hope of recovering the money would have vanished for ever. In other words it was merely a question of keeping options open.

For the more conspiratorially minded there is the theory that the action was launched as a way of putting pressure on the Government to help British Gas settle its costly dispute with North Sea producers over take or pay contracts. The evidence for this is that British Gas's action against the Government prompted counter-claims by the Government against the North Sea producers, some of whom squared the circle by taking action against BG. Wonderful for the lawyers, but ludicrous too. Actually there is some movement on this front, with a number of the North Sea producers likely to settle with BG over the coming months.

The best explanation, however, is the least complicated one. It is that this is simply another of those misjudged initiatives by BG and that again it has backfired.

Redwood's single currency warnings leave CBI unmoved

Chris Godsmark

Dire warnings of an impending economic nightmare if the UK joined a single European currency received little obvious support from CBI delegates in Harrogate yesterday in a clear sign of confidence in monetary union.

The CBI's high-profile debate on EMU saw John Redwood and Sir John Hoskyns, chairman of the Burton group and a former adviser to Lady Thatcher, putting the Eurosceptic case across the table from two leading advocates of EMU, Sir David Simon, chairman of BP and Peter Sutherland, chairman of investment bankers Goldman Sachs International and former head of the Gatt world trade organisation.

Mr Redwood claimed the switch to the euro would cost UK firms billions of pounds with only marginal benefits in terms of reduced transaction costs. Arguing that the underlying

agenda of Helmut Kohl, the German Chancellor, was political, he said: "He wants to build a country called Europe, governed from a City called Brussels with its economy directed from a bank in Frankfurt."

If Britain stepped up its opposition to EMU, Mr Redwood suggested the Government could still have a slim chance of stopping the single currency altogether.

The biggest applause, however, came after Sir David's rousing pro-European speech, liberally sprinkled with cricketer metaphors, and a savage attack on Britain's long history of currency devaluations. Sir David said fixing the pound to the ecu would act as a spur to business competitiveness, no longer shielded by a depreciating pound.

"If devaluation was the key to successful economic management we should be the wealthiest country in Europe, bar none," he argued.

He concluded: "We can't be half pregnant. Sooner or later we will have to make a choice. There isn't an option of sitting on the fence, both ears to the ground, waiting for the iron to enter our soul."

Mr Sutherland said Britain should join the single currency in the first wave in 1999, insisting that the UK had given up its sovereignty by signing up to the Single European Act and agreeing to extend qualified majority voting.

"If the issue of sharing sovereignty is raised in principle as opposed to its application then the debate is really about membership of the union," argued Mr Sutherland. However, Mr Redwood denied that he was calling for Britain to leave the EU altogether.

The blackest warnings of economic doom came from Sir John Hoskyns, who claimed EMU was "a complete dud" and "the biggest defensive merger of all time". Changing the currency



Dire warnings: John Redwood told the conference in Harrogate the switch to the euro would cost UK firms billions of pounds

would cost retailers across the EU £22bn, Sir John estimated. He said EMU was the result of "self deception, sloppy thinking and creative accounting". Just one delegate spoke from

the floor in favour of the Redwood and Hoskyns side, with seven speeches backing Sir David and Mr Sutherland. The reaction endorsed the CBI's opinion poll this week

showing 56 per cent of firms supporting the principle of EMU. Despite this, as the conference closed, CBI leaders continued to back the "wait and see" approach adopted by the

Government and Labour. "The reason we didn't put the issue to a vote on the conference floor is that the pro-EMU side would have won so decisively," admitted a CBI source.

Tobacco firms get writs

Magnus Grimond

Imperial Tobacco and Gallaher, two of Britain's highest cigarette companies, could face legal claims of up to £12m after writs were served yesterday in a landmark case alleging their products contributed to lung cancer.

Twelve cancer sufferers who started smoking between 1936 and 1955 are claiming that the companies' negligence in continuing to sell tobacco products after it became clear in the 1950s that high levels of tar contributed to the disease.

The tobacco industry is expected to put up fierce resistance to the claims, which could open the doors to a flood of further actions if successful. Imperial said yesterday it had strong defences which it would pursue vigorously.

The case is making legal history as the first group action by British smokers and the first to be undertaken on a "no-win, no-fee" basis. Martyn Day, the solicitor who is acting for the plaintiffs, said yesterday's move was very significant. "We have been fighting for four years to get to this stage and it is a great relief that we have got there. The phoney war is over and the real battle has begun."

Mr Day said about 60 cancer sufferers had signed up on a conditional fee basis. He estimated that the final number could eventually total between 100 and 200, which at an average claim of between £50,000 and £60,000 could mean an eventual total of as much as £12m. Further claims will be made over the next few months, he said. A full trial is not expected before October 1998.

Barclays chief and Bank Governor clash over rate rise

Michael Harrison

Andrew Buxton, the chairman of Barclays Bank, yesterday clashed with the Governor of the Bank of England, Eddie George, over last week's quarter point rise in interest rates. The clash came as Mr

George delivered a strong defence of the Bank's inflation strategy and fired a warning shot across the Chancellor's bows about the scope for Budget tax cuts.

Mr George told the CBI conference in Harrogate that the rise in base rates had been

necessary to curb a "textbook domestically-driven economic upswing" and repeated the Bank's view that some further rise may well be necessary in due course to keep a lid on inflation.

But Mr Buxton said the interest rate rise had not been

necessary although he recognised the Governor's concerns about inflation and the need to act early. He went on to urge the Chancellor to bear in mind that further interest rate rises would further strengthen the pound, depressing exports and manufacturing performance.

"We should therefore not rush to interest rate rises without thinking of our exporters," Mr George said that keeping a tight grip on inflation was not enough to improve economic performance alone. "It needs to be accompanied by prudent and sustainable

fiscal policy," he added.

On economic and monetary union, he said Britain did not need to be apprehensive about the euro, whether or not it joined in the first phase of a single currency. But it did need to be prepared. Mr George also took to

task those member states tempted to fudge their performance on debt and public deficit in the "hectic dash for the line" to qualify for a single currency, and their temptation to take artificial stimulants in order to get there.

IN BRIEF

• Nearly half of the 1.6 million new jobs created in the UK during the next 10 years will be in London and the South-east, according to a forecast published by the consultancy Business Strategies. The growth will be spearheaded by financial and business services, followed by public and personal services. The biggest rise in jobs for women is expected to be in professional and managerial jobs, with female employment in clerical and secretarial work falling. For men, professional and scientific jobs will increase, as will clerical work, but male employment in construction and industry is predicted to decline. Employment is forecast to rise in all regions except the North by 2006, but the South-east and London shares of the total will rise to 19 per cent and 14.6 per cent respectively.

• The US economy got a glowing annual report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, although it suggested ahead of today's meeting of the Open Market Committee that the Federal Reserve should consider raising interest rates as an insurance policy against higher inflation. The Paris-based think-tank singled out the stunning US job creation record for praise. The number of non-farm jobs rose by 2.25 million, or 2 per cent, in 1995, and another 1.9 million have been added so far this year. That brings the total to nearly 12 million since this economic cycle started in 1991.

• NatWest Bank customers will be able to use their cash dispenser cards in 7,000 ATM machines operated by the Link network from next spring, but NatWest will charge them a fee of 60p a time. Midland Bank customers can use NatWest machines but will not immediately join Link. Link members, who include Halifax, Abbey National, Woolwich and the Co-op, will have access to 2,300 NatWest machines but not to Midland. TSB customers are already able to use Link and MINT machines, giving them access to two-thirds of machines in the UK.

• Business Post, the Slough-based parcel and express mail carrier where the founding Kane brothers hold 69 per cent of the shares, saw pre-profits advance 30 per cent to £7.7m in the six months to September on sales 26 per cent higher at £7.7m. Earnings per share rose 29 per cent to 10.2p while the dividend was raised by a fifth to 3.6p.

• Sumitomo has submitted a criminal bill of complaint to the Tokyo district prosecutor's office, charging its former copper trader Yashuo Hamanaka with fraud against the company. The alleged fraud took the form of deceiving Sumitomo Corp's Hong Kong subsidiary to provide funds to pay for trades in non-existent copper warehouse receipts, it said. Sumitomo alleged that Mr Hamanaka obtained over \$770m from the Hong Kong unit on "false pretences" as they were used to settle accounts with brokers. Yesterday's complaint is the second filed by the company, it said. On October 21, a charge of forgery was brought against Mr Hamanaka.

Pain will measure the success of Japan's move to open market

Richard Lloyd Parry Tokyo

Japan's so-called "Big Bang", an ambitious programme of financial deregulation unexpectedly announced by the government on Monday night, was welcomed by business leaders yesterday, but faces formidable obstacles if it is to come fully into effect by its deadline of 2001.

Shunsaku Hashimoto, chairman of the Federation of Bankers' Associations of Japan, yesterday praised the government for its "plans to reinvigorate the financial market as a venue that can match New York and London". Opinion in Tokyo, however, was divided over whether political instability will consign the latest reform initiative to the sizeable scrap heap of disappointed promises.

Details of the plan are vague, although Finance Ministry officials are presenting it as the most wide-reaching and detailed ever seen in Japan. Under the slogan "Free, Fair, Global", it is intended to cut through the regulatory red tape which is increasingly causing the Tokyo markets to lag behind international competition.

If fully realised it will open up competition across a range of financial sectors, providing lucrative opportunities for smaller Japanese companies, as well as foreigners, hitherto excluded by the iron grip of the Ministry of Finance. But it also raises the

spectre of bankruptcies, especially for smaller firms, shakily emerging from a painful recession and banking crisis. Prominent among the proposals are plans to increase competition by allowing banks, brokerage houses and insurance companies the right to participate in one another's markets. Government regulation of insurance premiums and stock-broker commissions will also be reduced, and greater access

will be granted to Japan's vast, and hitherto closely regulated, pension market. Distinctions between commercial banks, long-term credit banks and trust banks will also be removed, enabling commercial banks to issue debentures and provide trust services which at present are virtually unavailable to ordinary Japanese investors.

The outline for the plan speaks of legal reforms, and changes in the tax and accounting regulations which would increase financial transparency and bring them closer to international standards. For instance, loopholes which make it difficult to calculate the precise assets of big corporations will be eliminated. The first step, an abolition of the rule which restricts foreign exchange transactions to authorised commercial banks, is set to be submitted to parliament in the new year.

The timetable for the rest of the programme is vague, and virtually all of the proposals have been fruitlessly floated before by various government panels and regulatory bodies. But the high-profile nature of the announcement, endorsed by the Prime Minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, less than a week after his formal re-election, will make it harder for politicians and bureaucrats to wriggle out of implementing them.

The biggest obstacle may be political. Mr Hashimoto's government is 12 seats short of a full majority and vested interests will ensure each new bill has a rough passage. Particular resistance can be expected from the many Japanese MPs who began their careers in the bureaucracy, and from big businesses which benefit from the current closed markets. "No matter how indispensable it may be for the Japanese economy in the 21st Century," concedes the draft plan, "such a thorough structural reform necessarily brings various pains."

Government urged to let BoJ off the leash

The Japanese government was advised yesterday to loosen control of its central bank in a set of recommendations which would mark the first hesitant steps towards an independent Bank of Japan, writes Richard Lloyd Parry.

In proposals which could become law as early as next January, a government-sponsored panel urged the Prime Minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, to abolish the rules that allow him to sack bank officials at will and in effect to veto policy decisions. While stopping far short of a Bundesbank-style arrangement, they would allow the BoJ's governor more leeway in formulating monetary policy. "We have now made the first step to securing the Bank of

East Midlands locked in talks with Dominion

East Midlands Electricity directors were last night locked in talks with their counterparts from Virginia-based Dominion Resources about the US utility's proposed takeover of the regional electricity company, writes Patrick Toher.

The meeting, at the London offices of East Midlands' advisers, Schroders, was called on Monday at the request of Dominion. The talks are understood to be between East Midlands' chief executive, Norman Askew, its finance director, Bob Davies, and Dominion chairman Thomas Capps and its chief financial officer, Linwood Robertson.

They followed Dominion's announcement last week that it was considering a bid at a price not much in excess of 60p a share, giving East Midlands a minimum valuation of £1.2bn.

Nottingham-based East Midlands scoffed at the price, saying it undervalued the Nottingham-based electricity company's prospects. Speculation that Dominion might be prepared to come up with an increased offer pushed shares in East Midlands higher yesterday. They closed at 611p, up 7.5p on the day, after touching 618.5p in earlier exchanges.

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Hogg misses a golden opportunity at Allied Domecq

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY TOM STEVENSON

Allied Domecq: at a glance

Market value: £4.83bn, share price 454p

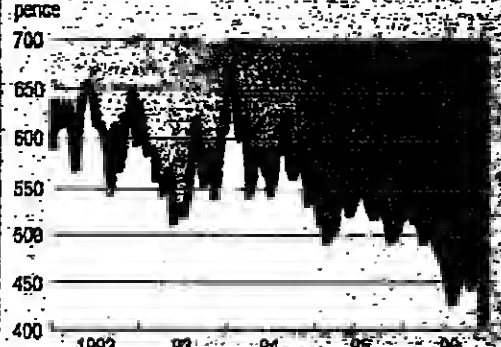
Five-year record	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Turnover (£m)	5,365	5,277	5,553	6,112	6,257	6,257
Pre-tax profits (£m)	439	505	594	504	554	554
Earnings per share (pence)	28.1	29.0	35.1	28.4	31.7	31.7
Dividends per share (pence)	18.5	20.5	21.5	23.5	25.5	25.5

* Pro forma year to August 1996, figures changed at year end

Trading Profit by activity



Share price



Sir Christopher Hogg has missed a golden opportunity to stamp his authority on Allied Domecq, a business crying out for a firm hand on the tiller. The City would have settled for either the clean slate that demerger would have represented or a management clear-out or both, but in the end it was offered only a management-speak palliative (translation: we have done a duff job and now we're trying harder). The shares closed 14p lower at 454p.

Sir Christopher gave a sensible justification for shunning demerger, which he neatly described as the "seductive option" given the weight of investor hacking for the idea. It would have cost a fortune in fees, he said, and caused serious tax headaches, especially for the spirits arm which earns most of its profits overseas and would fall short on UK earnings to offset its advance corporation tax liability.

What he didn't say explicitly, but almost certainly believes is that the current management is not up to the dual challenge of steering a steady trading course through turbulent conditions while preparing Allied for the big split. And of course if anyone knows what it takes to break up a large corporation it is Sir Christopher, who did the job with such resounding success at Courtalds.

What he did say yesterday, but *sotto voce* in case anyone actually heard, was that he was not prepared to stand up and sell either business to investors as an independent entity. Neither the Ballantines, Teachers and Beefeater spirits business, nor the Big Steak Pubs to Baskin Robbins and Dunkin Donuts retail arm are credible businesses on their own. Quite an indictment, but a refreshingly honest appraisal of the company he has inherited.

Results for the 12 months to August yesterday confirmed the difficulties facing the group. Even stripping out the change of year-end and the one-off costs of finally extricating itself from brewing that distorted the figures in the table, underlying profits were 11 per cent lower than a year previously, hit mainly by a \$80,000-case destocking by US wholesalers.

Spirits will continue to struggle against flat volumes around the world with prices moving in line with low inflation at best, and worryingly Allied appears to be coping less well with this trading backdrop than Guinness or GrandMet.

Retailing is well enough run, but it enjoys a less than exciting portfolio of brands including the memorable likes of Mr Q's and Wacky Warehouses and is being left standing by the really sharp operators like Whitbread.

On the basis of forecast profits of about £620m, the shares trade on a prospective price/earnings ratio of 12 and offer a dividend yield of more than 6.5 per cent. Given the long uphill slog ahead, that is not a harsh rating and the shares, which have underperformed the market by 40 per cent over the past three years, are no more than fairly priced.

Amersham is bubbling again

Amersham International, the radioactive chemicals to pharmaceuticals group, seems to have recovered some of its poise since disappointing the market with flat interim results a year ago. Yesterday's 43 per cent rise in interim profits to September of £28.4m beat expectations and a half-way dividend

hoisted 22 per cent to 6p reflected the group's bubbling optimism about the rest of this year and next.

The figures received a one-off boost from the steady build up in the period of Amersham's stake in Nihon Medi-Physics, a Japanese radio-pharmaceutical joint venture with Sumitomo Chemical, which chipped in £4.3m in the half year.

But things are going right for Amersham on several fronts. The £106m cost of the NMP holding now

looks cheap. Last year's profits growth of over 20 per cent is impressive enough, but the combination of a ready-to-use version of Amersham's Myoview heart imaging product from January with NMP's marketing muscle opens up a Japanese market expected soon to be worth £40m.

Meanwhile, the recent introduction of Myoview to the US launches it on to the largest market in the world, valued at around £75m and

growing at 15 per cent a year. Myoview, which saw first half sales soar 126 per cent, is set to emerge as Amersham's lead product.

But there was also good news for Ceretec, Amersham's more elderly brain imaging agent, which reversed a three-year decline induced by the launch of Du Pont's rival Neuroline. Overall, the sturdy performance of Amersham's branded products helped lift margins in the healthcare division from

8.9 to 12.2 per cent. It brings them much closer to the long-term target of matching the 20 per cent or more notched up by the core life sciences side.

That will be boosted by the end of the research and development expenditure pause at the big drugs groups, which now account for more than half the division's sales. Longer-term, yesterday's three-way licensing deal between Amersham, Parke-Davis of the US and Roche will cement the British group's already strong position in advanced genetics.

Raised full-year profit forecasts of £67m would put the shares on a forward yield of 16, after a 22.5p rise to £10.25 yesterday. Now only back where they were at the start of 1994, they should have further to go.

Branching out benefits Vosper

It is hard to fault Vosper Thornycroft's strategy of reducing its dependence on its core shipbuilding business.

Defence orders such as the Type 23 frigate deal on which Vosper last out to GEC earlier this year stand to follow a lumpy pattern which is hardly conducive to sensible planning.

Instead, the Southampton-based engineer has been developing other businesses in facilities management and training where it is benefiting from the trend towards contracting out.

These businesses account for a third of group sales and a quarter of profits with plans to boost the latter figure to 40 per cent.

So far these operations include Flagship, which handles the Royal

Navy's training requirements and Vosper Mantech which runs engineering works for GCHQ. Vosper even runs Hampshire's careers service.

The fruits of the strategy were evident in yesterday's results for the six months to 30 September. Pre-tax profits were 11 per cent ahead to £12.7m on sales slightly lower at £107m.

Almost two-thirds of sales are to export markets with the Middle and Far East particularly strong. In the first half, it delivered minichunters to Saudi Arabia and fast-strike craft to Qatar.

It is this business that is the key. Vosper's order book currently stands at £400m and the group is expected to report a steady increase in profits until 1998.

But it needs a new order soon to re-assure investors about prospects after that. Chief executive Martin Jay is confident that such an order can be secured in the next three to six months. Prospects are encouraging in the Middle and Far East, the company says.

And Vosper has tendered for the fleet maintenance contract at Portsmouth Dock in conjunction with GEC, a contract which would be worth hundreds of millions of pounds.

The business still has £111m of cash, some of which will be used for acquisitions in electronic controls and marine products, though there are no imminent purchases.

The shares have been trading water recently though, as ever, they remain sensitive to new orders and volatility in export markets.

Assuming full-year profits of £31m, the shares - up a penny yesterday at 836p - trade on an undemanding forward rating of 13. Worth holding.

Tiny reminds MPs of a nasty business five years ago

PEOPLE & BUSINESS

The behaviour of Tiny Rowland, ousted founder of Lloyds, is becoming a right odd. Yesterday a glossy brochure plopped on my desk titled "R.W. Tiny Rowland: An Apology." Inside the three-page pamphlet, Francesc Pollard apologises to Tiny for his "long and vicious campaign against him under my name."

Miss Pollard, an unemployed mother of two, admits she carried out a four-year anti-Tiny Rowland campaign funded and organised by Mohamed Al Fayed. She "signed and distributed libellous letters to members of both Houses of Parliament, the legal profession including judges, and thousands of other influential people in England and abroad."

And on it goes. But hang on a minute. The "apology" is

son, he candidly admits that things could go wrong. He has asked the vice-chancellor to agree to postpone his start date from 1 January to 1 April 1997.

He says that if the position has not been clarified by then "I will, with the greatest regret, withdraw my acceptance of its [the school's] offer."

This is tricky, since Baroness Hogg is due to take over as chairwoman of London Economics on 1 January whatever happens. So if the business school is souped up Mr Kay will "take a long holiday, write a book, and do bits of work for London Economics. I'm not going to be short of work."

Angered as he is by the

their beards. There's some consolation for the whiskers brigade, however. Over 80 per cent of men over 45 said that facial hair would not affect the level of trust they had in a man.

So will Bransoo shave it off?

Peter and Michael Kane founded their Business Post parcel delivery company based in Slough over 20 years ago. Last year Peter stepped down as chairman, despite the fact that the company's shares have done very well. Perhaps making money just gets boring after a while. Now Michael Kane has declared he is stepping down in March, and will go to live in Jersey.



In happier times: Lloyds founder Tiny Rowland (left) and Mohamed Al Fayed

signed and dated 25 June 1991. Why send it out now, over five years later?

Apparently it is aimed at the House of Commons Privileges Committee, which is investigating Mr Neil Hamilton MP to point out what a thoroughly nasty chap Mr Fayed is.

"We feel the committee needs reminding of who they're dealing with," said Josie Rowlands, Tiny's wife. All very odd.

John Kay, who has resigned his job as chairman of the influential London Economics consultancy in order to become the first director of the Said Business School in Oxford, is a bitterly disappointed man.

"Last Tuesday was a disastrous day for Oxford," he said, referring to the day vote against accepting Wafic Said's £20m donation for the new school.

While Mr Kay remains optimistic that the postal vote of Oxford's 3,000 dons this week will overturn the earlier reject-

vote, he only wants the school to go ahead if it gets the full £20m from Mr Said. "I don't want anything half cock or second rate, and neither does Mr Said."

Bad news for Richard Branson of Virgin, Alan Sugar of Spurs, entrepreneur Peter de Savary, Graham Day (formerly of Rover) and the Duke of Kent.

"Young women do not trust men with beards, but are more tolerant than their male counterparts when it comes to casual dress in a business situation," says a survey.

The survey of 500 men and women of varying ages was conducted by insurer CQA Direct. It showed that "younger women displayed a marked aversion to bearded men - 32 per cent said that they would have less trust in a man with a beard."

No doubt this is why John Sanderford, chief executive of Cadbury Schweppes, and Roger Myers, founder of Feli-can (now owned by Whitbread) have both shaved off

So is he one of a growing band of chief executives who are heading for the exits to avoid a Labour tax bombshell? No, no, says Mr Kane, there are the charms of Jersey, the better climate, the kids will love it, the lower taxation. "I'll be going anyway even if the Conservatives get back in."

Ironically if the Tories do get re-elected, it could be a big opportunity for Business Post, since it's in a good position to profit from any privatisation of the Royal Mail.

SBC Warburg re-jigged its emerging markets operations in the Far East yesterday. Rodney Ward has spent some time integrating SBC and Warburg in Asia, and he is now returning to Europe to revamp emerging markets operations here. Mr Ward is succeeded by Luqman Arnold, who joins from Banque Paribas, where he was head of the business development department.

John Willcock

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market report / shares

Data Bank

FTSE 100
3934.3 + 19.9

FTSE 250
4404.8 + 9.0

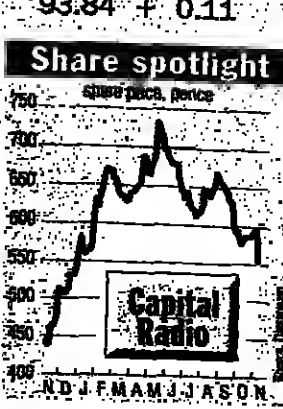
FTSE 350
1963.5 + 8.6

SEAQ VOLUME
659.3m shares,

35,454 bargains

Gifts Index
93.84 + 0.11

Share spotlight



Berisford parts from broker after profits warning

Berisford International, which stunned the stock market with a profit warning, has suddenly parted company with its long-time stockbroker, ABN Amro Hoare Govett. Although Hoare played down the split there is little doubt it resented because it felt uncomfortable with Berisford's trading performance and its shares slump; the price is at a year's low of 103p against 268p last year.

An industrial dispute at Magnet and a downturn in the US were blamed for the profit warning when expectations for the year ended September were cut to £25m from £33m. Barclays de Zoete Wedd has taken over as Berisford's broker.

The rest of the market made hesitant progress with Footsie up 19.9 points to 3,934.3 with the latest interest rate comments of Bank of England Governor Eddie George creating more caution.

The Retail Consortium's October survey helped retailers although much of Diageo's 18.5p gain to 566p was due to a story of a Kingfisher bid. The confusion could have been

raised, through Hoare, £58.7m to take over the Magnet kitchen operation and then, with a loan stock, £334m, largely to fund the takeover of Welbilt, a US maker of commercial kitchen equipment.

An industrial dispute at Magnet and a downturn in the US were blamed for the profit warning when expectations for the year ended September were cut to £25m from £33m. Barclays de Zoete Wedd has taken over as Berisford's broker.

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MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

stock market reporter of the year



he had rejected thoughts of a demerger the shares have lost 30.5p.

Guinness frothed up 8.5p to 445.5p as stories resurfaced that LVMH was moving to place a bid for the 21 per cent interest. It was suggested a number of securities houses had talked to the French group but had been unable to agree a price. With its thirst to expand the French group is thought to be keen to raise cash and it is coming round to the view that Guinness represents its cash cow.

East Midlands Electricity ended 7.5p higher at 611p as talks started with potential US bidder, Dominion Resources.

Pearson rose 12.5p to 729p in belated response to the new Henderson Crosthwaite break-

TAKING STOCK

Ofex continues to attract newcomers. Latest are Northstar Securities, a property group, and Recall, a car audio firm that has developed a vehicle security system. Northstar is raising £3.3m, selling units of five shares and one warrant at 125p. It is buying the 3M pension fund's property portfolio for £10.5m. Recall is raising £900,000, selling shares at 15p. Its audio business is profitable; the cash will be used to develop the security system which immobilises a vehicle.

Sunderland could be the next Premiership football club to seek a stock market presence. It is thought to have appointed NM Rothschild and Charterhouse Tintin to advise on a flotation. Bob Murray, the club's chief executive, is thought to be keen to bring the club to market.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is last year's dividend, propped up by 20 per cent, as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding exceptional items.

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For assistance, call our helpline 071 873 4375 (9.30am - 5.30pm).

Call cost 50p per minute (daytime), 45p per minute at all other times. Call charges include

Market leaders: Top 20 volumes

Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol
BT	920000	BP	840000	Lloyds TSB	500000	Coventry	500000
Orange	540000	BTI	700000	BTI	500000	National Grid	400000
Harison	800000	Imperial Tobacco	640000	Smith & Neph	540000	Bath Gas	400000
Wendell	800000	Alloy Dome	500000	British Airways	500000	Legal & General	400000
Barton	200000	Petrol & Chemical	500000	Leasing	500000	Packard	400000

FTSE 100 Index hour by hour

Open	11.00	12.00	13.00	14.00	15.00
3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4
3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4
3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4	3921.5 up 7.4

High/Low Stock Price Chg %

High	Low	Stock	Price Chg %
200.00	190.00	BT	+5.0%
150.00	140.00	BP	+3.0%
100.00	90.00	Lloyds TSB	+2.0%
80.00	70.00	Coventry	+1.0%

Telecommunications

Stock	Price	Chg %
BT	200.00	+5.0%
Orange	150.00	+3.0%
BTI	100.00	+2.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%

Textiles & Apparel

Stock	Price	Chg %
Smith & Neph	54.00	+2.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Retailers, Food

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Retailers, General

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Printing & Paper

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Property

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Support Services

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Transport

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Water

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Rights Issues

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Recent Issues

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%



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Investment Trusts

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Health Care

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Household Goods

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Insurance

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Government Securities

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Index-linked

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Unlisted

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Short

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Medium

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Long

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Index-linked

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

Unlisted

Stock	Price	Chg %
Coventry	50.00	+1.0%
BTI	70.00	+3.0%
BTM	80.00	+1.0%
BT	200.00	+5.0%

geon

Hard
OFFER
LOW
ST RATE

0% APR

Back on
AGA

sport

Stanford Arms struggle to beat last season's tally of minus two points

A word of warning to those Premiership sides who think an open cheque book is the passport to success. Before forking out the price of a Canaletto for some foreigner with an unpronounceable name, they should heed the lesson of Nomads FC from the Norwich Lads and Minors League. In an effort to bring a run of poor results to an end, Nomads forked out 25p for a new goalie. It didn't work. They lost every game and finished the 1972 season with 11 goals for and 431 against, an impressive tally from just 20 matches.

Nomads, not surprisingly, finished the season with no points. And for more than 20 years, their performance has allowed the most inept club to draw some comfort. "Well, at least we didn't do as badly as Nomads." But another East Anglian club has surpassed this legendary achievement, finishing last season in the Lowestoft Sunday League with minus two points.

In the circumstances, it might have been reasonable for Stanford Arms FC to change their name, sack their manager, pull in a few ringers

or simply disband. The side did none of these. Battered but unbowed, they took a positive view of their ignominious relegation. It would give the side a chance to consolidate, to rebuild and to compete in less competitive waters.

Now it would be unfair to judge their progress so early in the season. But sadly, the side officially recognised by the Football Association as Britain's worst club are on course to maintain the title. Seven league games and a couple of cup ties along the road, and Stanford Arms have lost every match.

Even their sponsor, Brian Cook, who faithfully turns up for every match - "although not too early or they have me running the line" - is somewhat critical of their form. "How would I describe them? Well, crap is the word that immediately comes to mind," he said.

Cook took over the small Lowestoft club three years ago. "When I started, we had quite a good team and a couple of seasons ago they were runners-up in the Second Division." Then it all went wrong.

In such circumstances, the boss



KEITH ELLIOTT
at large

is the obvious scapegoat. Since 42-year-old Graham Buckenham took over as Stanford Arms manager, their record has been almost as bad as the memorable Stockport United squad, who lost 39 successive league and cup matches in the Stockport League between September 1976 and February 1978.

"Our worst defeat last season was 14-0 in a cup match, while it was 9-0 in a league match," Buckenham recalls. "But we weren't as bad as all that. We ran a couple of the top

teams close, and only lost 2-1 to AFC Railway, who are one of the best teams in our league.

"The trouble was that our ex-manager said at the start of last season that we wouldn't be putting in a team, so many of the players drifted away.

"I just sort of inherited the job and had to put a team together at short notice. I knew we were going to struggle because the standard is high in the First Division. A lot of players turn out for sides like Lowestoft and Yarmouth."

Amazingly, Stanford Arms drew their first match last season. But, from then, it was a head-long plunge downhill. "We always had problems raising a team, because we only had 15 to choose from. Our goalies didn't always turn up, and we often had only nine or 10 players. Even I played almost every match."

"On one occasion, we lost three points because we were penalised for calling off a match at too short notice." Hence their points tally. Their supporters never wavered in their loyalty, despite having precious little to applaud. "As well

as Brian, there's Robbie, Billy, Ken and Suzanne who turn up for all our matches. We usually have at least half a dozen," Buckenham says proudly. And the side won a couple of cup matches, including an 11-1 victory against Dukes Hotel FC, "though they only had seven men," Buckenham admits.

The league was a different matter. Defeat followed defeat. But it never occurred to the players that they had done so badly until the FA officially announced that Stanford Arms FC had the worst record of all the 42,000 teams under its jurisdiction. "Then we got more publicity than the team that won the league," said Liam Holmes, one of the regular players.

Amazingly, their dismal form has done them no harm at all. "At the start of this season, a lot of youngsters asked if they could play for us," Buckenham said. "We've now got 26 players, a regular goalie and I can even have subs."

However, it hasn't put them back to winning ways. To make things worse, they have lost their star scorer, Jonathan Thompson,



Stanford Arms manager Graham Buckenham (left) and one of his players, Liam Holmes, relax in traditional style. Photograph: Peter Jay

who got seven of their 11 league goals last season.

Buckenham says that bad luck has been a factor - "We even lost our centre-forward when he pulled a muscle in the warm-up" - but he is unwilling to change a losing formula. "We don't have extra training or anything like that. We just go out and enjoy it."

Holmes is miffed at the very suggestion. "Some people take their football a lot too seriously. They think it is more important to get their name in the paper." He is fiercely supportive of the

manager, and bristles at any suggestion that new leadership might halt their losing sequence. "It's not his fault. Graham tells us what we're doing wrong and I nearly always agree with him. We have to learn to play as a team. The trouble is, a lot of heads go down when we're losing 3-0 or 4-0 at half-time. "But it will come. We have good players. It is just a matter of confidence. If we win a match, I think that could turn the corner. It could even be the next game. Then again, it might take three or four seasons."

Wright's mission of discovery

Football

Ian Wright is learning French to help him stay on the same wavelength as Patrick Vieira, the new hero of Highbury.

Vieira, the £3.5m French Under-21 international who has already become a big favourite with the Arsenal supporters after just eight matches, aims to supply more ammunition for Wright in the third-round Coca-Cola Cup replay at home to Stoke tonight. Wright, who has scored 13

goals already this season, said: "Patrick has been a brilliant addition to the team for me. He has set up some great chances for me with his passing, especially the goals I got against Middlesbrough and Blackburn recently."

Vieira, who was actually born in Senegal, has been given the nickname "What" by the Arsenal players. It is his usual reply to their questions as he struggles to learn the English language.

"He's trying, but I thought I would have a go at picking up

a few French phrases from him at the same time. It can only help our understanding," said Wright.

The 33-year-old striker is aware that his side face another tough task to knock out the First Division Potteries team, who were good value for a battling 1-1 draw in the original game at the Victoria Ground three weeks ago. "They will be even more up for this one at Highbury, especially as it is live on television," said Wright, who scored Arsenal's late equaliser to earn the replay.

Mike Sheron, whose goal put Stoke ahead, is ready for another solo mission. He is likely to be their lone striker in front of a five-man midfield which manager Lou Macari is again expected to employ.

"We faced a tall order at our place and it will be even taller tomorrow night. But if we can keep things tight early on we will have a fighting chance. The longer we keep them out, the more their supporters will get anxious, and with someone like Mike Sheron around we will always have a chance of pinching a goal," Macari said.

Stoke's Northern Ireland full-back Nigel Worthington is doubtful with an injury collected on World Cup duty against Germany and the Italian Mirko Taccardi, who is on loan, could make a surprise debut.

The Gunners are virtually certain to be unchanged tonight, with Dennis Bergkamp, the Netherlands's hat-trick hero against Wales, John Hartson, Tony Adams, David Seaman, David Platt and Wright all unscathed by World Cup duty.

Paul Merson, who was a late withdrawal from England's trip to Georgia through a groin injury, is back in training again, while Hartson, although still serving a three-match suspension in the Premiership, is eligible for Coca-Cola Cup action but not Saturday's League trip to Manchester United.

Ally McColist goes into one of the most crucial Old Firm derbies of the past decade tomorrow ready to claim yet another scoring record. The Rangers striker is just one short of equalling Gordon Wallace's post-war Scottish League record of 264 goals. An added incentive is the fact that the meeting with Celtic at Parkhead will be broadcast live on satellite television.



Neil Price (right) urges on his Hendon side: "The pressure is not on us. This could be a real banana skin for Cardiff". Photograph: Adam Scott

Price's Wembley memories on hold



FA CUP COUNTDOWN

The traditional approach of mind-numbing in the FA Cup is to talk up the opposition for fear of a good hammering. Neil Price does not believe in the traditional approach.

"You have got to have a cut-throat attitude," the Hendon manager said, as he prepared his team for their first-round tie at Ninian Park on Saturday. "If you go into these games like a mug, you may as well pin some donkey ears on and let them laugh at you. There's no way we'll be going to Cardiff like that."

"With all respect to Cardiff City, they are not exactly Manchester United, are they? Outside the Premiership, the standard in football has squeezed out. Most of our lads have played at a good level and I really don't think we are far off them."

Which is fighting talk coming from a manager whose team is bottom of the Ics Premier Divi-

sion. But, having played in an FA Cup final, perhaps Price knows a thing or two about the vagaries of knock-out competition.

His current mood of gloom was Watford's left-back in the 1984 final against Everton. Luck played its part in his career when injuries to Wilf Rostrop led to a short but spectacular spell with the Vicarage Road club.

Price made 11 appearances in the No 3 shirt, playing against Manchester United, Arsenal (twice), Levens Spartak, Sparta Prague, a Cup semi-final at Villa Park against Plymouth... and then the Cup final itself.

"It was a good day out, school-boy dreams fulfilled and all that, but it just went over my head. We were a really young side, especially the back four. I was 20 and the other lads were about the same age. Don't remember much about it."

"We went 2-0 down and I came off but we weren't that bothered. Graham [Taylor] wanted to be a great day out for everybody. We didn't expect to win, but just made up the numbers."

Kevin Grogan finds Hendon's manager confident of causing concern in Cardiff

Price doesn't talk much about the Cup final and doesn't mention it to the players ("they'd think I was a right clown"). Still, he is not the only one to have links with Wembley.

The club did indeed regard itself as the Manchester United of amateur football in the 1950s and 60s, and made the five-mile trip to the stadium on seven occasions, six more than their Welsh opponents. A crowd of 100,000 watched Hendon against Bishop Auckland in 1955 in the FA Amateur Cup final.

In more recent times, Hendon made the third round of the FA Cup in 1974, holding Newcastle to a 1-1 draw at St James' Park. Alas, the days of big crowds were over, the club foundered financially and were put up for sale in 1994. Five days before closure, millionaire Ivor Arbiter,

whose company distributes Fender guitars, stepped in, bringing Price and his assistant, Richard Parkin, to Hendon in November last year.

"When we arrived here, it was like bloody Colditz, barbed wire and broken glass everywhere. Now the commercial side is going well, the banqueting suite should be ready in January, which will also be used as a youth club. We have a good relationship with the council and we are on a solid footing."

Attendances now do not come close to the level of the 50s, hovering around the 400 mark, but the masterplan is to increase the capacity and get into the Vauxhall Conference. "Ivor has given me money to strengthen the team. We've got a decent side and players like Junior Lewis and Jermaine Darlington are as good as most players in the Conference or the Third Division."

"We've got lots of games in hand because we are in five cup competitions. OK, the league position looks bad but we have only lost twice in 15 games."

Hendon are now in only four cups, having lost to Sutton United at home in the FA Umbro Trophy last Saturday. Price admitted that they were lucky to keep the score down to 3-1 as the majority of players were thinking more in terms of Cardiff than Clarendon Road.

"It's annoying. You prepare them correctly and they play like that. Still, they know they were rubbish. We missed Curtis [Warrington, the club captain] at the back but he'll be back for Saturday. But, let's face it, the pressure is not on us. This could be a real banana skin for Cardiff. They lost to Enfield at this stage two years ago."

"Dover of the Vauxhall Conference didn't show us any respect in the third qualifying round. We went there and beat them 1-0. Some journalist from the Western Post or something in Wales phoned me up and said: 'Have you got any chance?' Cheeky so-and-so. Of course we have got a great chance and we are going to push them bloody hard."

HOW CAN I MAKE the most of my savings and investments?

TURN TO Money

United deny bid for Bierhoff

Manchester United have denied they have made a £12m bid for the German striker Oliver Bierhoff, saying the claim was "completely unfounded".

Reports from Italy said that Bierhoff's Serie A club, Udinese, had rebuffed an approach from United for the 28-year-old, who scored Germany's "golden goal" winner in the final of the Euro 96.

On a busy day for their rebuttal unit, United also denied that Alex Ferguson has agreed a five-year deal with Erik Nevland, a Norwegian trialist, Nevland, who is to return to Norway to complete one year's national service, scored hat-tricks in both of his appearances for United's A and reserve sides.

The Premiership champions are to allow flags into the ground when Juventus visit Old Trafford for next Wednesday's Champions' League game. Ken Ramsden, a United

spokesman, said: "There is no blanket ban on flags as many people suspect, as long as they are small. What we do object to are large flags on poles which obstruct people's view of the game."

Perhaps that might alleviate the worries of the club's Independent Supporters' Association, which has voiced its concern about the lack of atmosphere at the ground. "We want to see a return to the days when supporters sang and chanted to urge the team on instead of sitting there waiting for something to happen before they make a sound," a spokesman said.

Barcelona have denied reports that they are still interested in signing David Ginola from Newcastle. They admitted they tried to sign the player during the summer, but were put off by the high price being asked for him.

Several Spanish newspapers reported a transfer was possible after Ginola's agent was seen in the president's box at Barcelona's game against Atletico Madrid on Saturday. Bolton Wanderers have confirmed an interest in Chelsea's Mark Hughes should he find himself out of favour at Stamford Bridge after the arrival of Gianfranco Zola. Colin Todd, the manager on the First Division leaders, said: "We enquired about the player in the summer only to be told he wasn't available. If and when that changes, we would be interested as we would with any good players."

Bolton already have one Welsh striker at Burnden Park, Nathan Blake, but he is rated doubtful for the league game at Birmingham tonight. Blake missed his country's World Cup qualifier against the Netherlands on Saturday with an ankle problem.

Fans pay less for France 98

Spectators will pay less to watch the 1998 World Cup finals in France compared to the United States in 1994.

The cheapest ticket for a first-round game will cost £145 (£19) and half will be priced at £125 (£33) or less. A seat at the final will cost from £46 to £293. In the United States, the lowest-priced ticket for the final was £153.

Tickets for the 55 round-robin games will go on sale on 27 November, but more than a quarter of the two million tickets have already been bought by members of the French football community in advance sales.

Almost half the tickets will be available to the French public and foreign tour operators, with the rest for national federations, sponsors and organisers. The 500,000 tickets for the opening game and ceremonies as well as the quarter-finals, semi-finals and final go on sale next autumn.

Football		Rugby Union	
WORLD CUP GROUP SIX Spain v Slovakia (20.00) Scotland v Romania (20.00) Czech Republic v Slovakia (20.00) Slovakia v Czech Republic (20.00) Romania v Spain (20.00) Slovakia v Romania (20.00)		NORTHERN COUNTRIES EAST LEAGUE Preston v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Preston (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45)	
COCA-COLA CUP THIRD-ROUND REPLAYS Arsenal v Stoke (7.45) Coventry v Birmingham (7.45) Liverpool v Chelsea (7.45) Manchester City v Bolton (7.45) Manchester City v Bolton (7.45) Manchester City v Bolton (7.45)		FA YOUTH CUP FIRST ROUND Arsenal v Arsenal (7.45) Arsenal v Arsenal (7.45) Arsenal v Arsenal (7.45) Arsenal v Arsenal (7.45) Arsenal v Arsenal (7.45) Arsenal v Arsenal (7.45)	
WIDENESS LEAGUE Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45)		WIDENESS LEAGUE Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45) Wigan v Wigan (7.45)	

sport

Snelling sees gold in the Lottery pool

Guy Hodgson meets a dreamer who believes in British swimming

How about this for a pronouncement. "I see no reason why we shouldn't be the No 1 nation at the Olympic Games in four years." Who said it? Someone one length short of a race distance or a wild optimist with little grip on reality? We are talking swimming, after all, a sport in which Britain won just one medal at the Barcelona Games and two in Atlanta. That was the men's women do cartwheels if they get anyone through to a final.

The author of what appears to be an absurd statement is Deryk Snelling, British swimming's newly-appointed National Performance Director. He says it because he believes it, even if the positive comes with a litany of provisos.

"If we can get the resources that will be available from the Lottery," Snelling said, beginning his list. "If it's done correctly, if it's focused where it needs to be and if we, the coaches, do our jobs to the best of our ability, there is no reason why British swimmers should not be going to the podium time after time."

"Certainly, we could give America a hard time as the Australians have in the past. The US are not unbeatable in this game but we are up against a 1,000-fold difference in terms of support. Not 10 per cent but one thousand times. There's not a university in the US that isn't better funded in terms of swimming than our entire nation."

Pipe dreams, then. We could get there if we spend the money. But Britain is a nation where Paul Palmer's coach, Ian Turner, had to take unpaid leave from his teaching job for eight months to prepare for his silver swim in Atlanta. It is the country where our top athletes have to train at 5am. It is also the place which has fewer indoor 50m pools than the Canadian city of Winnipeg.

Yet the grounds for Snelling's optimism are embodied in himself. Twenty nine years ago, the 63-year-old from Darwen,



Dreaming by the pool: 'I see no reason why we shouldn't be the No 1 nation at the Olympic Games in four years,' says Deryk Snelling.

Photograph: Simon Wilkinson

Lancashire, left Britain because he felt swimming in this country was going nowhere. Canada was a land of opportunity and he grabbed it, helping his adopted home achieve 19 Olympic medals, six world records and 23 short course best times. The fact he has returned is a happy omen in itself.

"I want to achieve a dream," he said, "and Canada which was investing across the board in sport provided it. I can see the same thing over here now. GB has a tremendous future because it has so far to go to catch up but most of the things we need to do will be available to us thanks to money from the National Lottery. It's the right time."

Snelling was talking in Leeds,

which he was visiting as part of a programme of meetings with the country's leading coaches. He was due to see Terry Denison, Adrian Moorhouse's former mentor, that day; the night before he had visited Dave Calleja, who guided Graham Smith to bronze in Atlanta, in Stockholm. It is part of the learning process, swapping ideas.

"Even at European junior level we are really strong," Snelling said. "We've just been missing the mark a little bit at the last few Olympics. We've consistently won medals but a nation of this many talented swimmers and coaches ought to have performed better. My role is to fill those gaps. Someone thinking at a world level who

is not distracted with other responsibilities."

Snelling's ambition is an academy where the top swimmers train with the best at the peak of the pyramid. That will be sup-

ported by five regional centres and under that 30 leading clubs. That is the infrastructure - for the elite swimmers he wants money, lots of it, to give Britain an equal chance. He does not want our medal hopes reaching

Olympic Games handicapped by lack of finance and with only scant experience of hantling against the best.

"If we took 10 swimmers al-

titude training once, not three

despite the system. There isn't a swimming club in this country that doesn't have a world-class athlete but the problem is there isn't the mechanism to let these people mature and progress through the system.

"It's all so hit-and-miss. If an athlete isn't born in the right part of the country or a coach doesn't happen to be in the pool at the right time, it never happens. We have to solve these problems."

The countdown to Sydney 2000 begins next month with the European Short Course Championships in Rostock, Germany. After that, there are the European Championships in Seville next August and in 14 months time a milestone which should give Snelling an idea

whether his work is bearing fruit, the World Championships in Perth, Australia.

"We have a great nucleus now. Our two medalists in Atlanta are young but even the people who didn't show at those Olympics are incredible. Given the right preparation and the right support, they'll make it to the podium. These are great athletes, they make you feel excited. I feel prickly all over just thinking about what they could achieve."

Let us hope Snelling is right: that the financial support is coming and the Lottery will provide a panacea to chronic under-funding. Then we might all get prickly all over come the next Olympics.

Headley earns praise and rest

Cricket

Dean Headley earned reluctant praise yesterday for his outstanding contribution to England's tour from South Australia's Joe Scuderi. The Kent fast bowler claimed a career-best 11 for 26 - the fifth time in as many first-class matches for England A he has captured five wickets or more in an innings - to help the tourists snatch a sensational 12-run victory over the Sheffield Shield holders in Adelaide on Monday.

South Australia, a normally disciplined and highly competitive outfit, were reduced to openly disputing two of Headley's wickets and Jamie Siddons, their captain, and Scuderi were spoken to for dissent by the umpires.

Scuderi, who has played for the Lancashire League club Colne for the past six seasons, put aside his disappointment at England's victory to salute Headley's performance.

"He's a really good bowler," Scuderi admitted. "He's got a bit of zip about him and he bowls at the stumps. He also bowls just short of a length, which doesn't give you much to go on."

England made the short flight across South Australia to Mount Gambier yesterday to begin preparations for their four-day match against the much-heralded Academy side when Headley is expected to be rested.

Jimmy Adams and Courtney Browne spared the West Indies' blushes yesterday in their limited-overs match against a Northern Territory Invitational XI at Alice Springs. Coming together at 84 for 5, the sixth-wicket pair added 98 to lift their side to 218 for 8 in their 50 overs. The Invitational XI, containing seven Sheffield Shield players, were dismissed for 170 in 42.5 overs.

YOUNG MANAGER (Alice Springs): West Indies 218 for 8 (50 overs); J.C. Adams 67, C.O. Browne 50; Northern Territory Invitational XI 170 (42.5 overs); A.C. Collyer 54-0-0-0-0, West Indies won by 48 runs.



INDEPENDENT FANTASY FOOTBALL

LATEST RESULTS AND TOP 50 TEAMS

TOP FIFTY LEAGUE TABLE

CALCULATED ON MATCHES PLAYED FROM 17 AUGUST - 3 NOVEMBER

POS.	NAME	TEAM	POINTS
1	John Coxs	Southill FC	397
2	S.A. Scott	Foreign Back Bone	390
3	Chris Scott	Bruce Lee FC	389
4	Paul Gizzard	Chocolate Tea Pots	382
5	Aaron Jones	Catiron 2	379
6	Carl Britton	Maple Mousers E	378
7	Steven Lawrence	Tessa's Little Marvels	377
7	Stephen Hart	Kees Cowboys	377
7	Adam Hogg	Blaggy Hogg	377
7	S. King	Cruising Alexandra	377
7	Andrew Burman	Wimbledon Scudid Heads	377
12	Ian Boyle		374
12	J.M. Salt	Jetty City	374
14	Paul Macbray	Championasse I	374
14	Keith Horry	Organic Manure FC	374
14	D.J. Robinson	Tank For England	374
17	S. Walls	The Untouchables	373
17	G. Lake	Basinet Of Eggs	373
17	Jonathan McCrossan	Washtops Army	373
17	Robert Northcroft	I Know Your Wife	373
21	Peter Shelock	Lincoln St. Giles	372
21	H. Crossland	Olney C. Lyons	372
21	C.M. Down	The Deals Reserves	372
21	Peter Frankental	Arkenis	372
21	David Robinson	Double B	372
21	Mr. Stouck		372
21	Krisov Baerwald	Tom and Phillip	372
28	Mr. Andrew Clark	Clark United	371
28	David Edmondson	Edmo United	371
28	Steve Payne	Mordalefield Tuesday	371
31	Husam Sathry	I'm Off To France United	370
31	Michael Dows	That's Handy Harry	370
31	Mr. D. Cannon	Know can do F.C.	370
34	Steve Bassett	Bazzy's Defence	369
34	Dr. Tom Boyle	Last Gasp Gullits	369
34	J. Lippitt	Clean Sheet	369
34	David Baker	Baker Boys	369
34	G. Jones	Abbey Last United	369
34	Keith Watson	Elementary Opportunities	369
34	Mr. S. Walker	Independent Movie	369
34	Robert Pringle	Deepdale Villa 7	369
34	Eric Frankental	Joe Mart	369
34	A. Vickers	Football Magic	369
44	John Fyfe	Hampshire Racing FC	368
44	Barry Lee	Lee Manor	368
44	Steve Payne	No Future In Furry	367
44	Jake Gibbons	Champagne Sleepingover	367
44	Steve Thorne	Spots, T's Superstars	367

THE INDEPENDENT

Today we publish the latest results in our Independent Fantasy Football game, supported by Philips Energy Saver Light Bulbs.

The Team Market and Scores table published below, shows four scores. The Week 13 (Wk 13) column lists all points scored in matches played between Monday 4 November - Sunday 10 November inclusive. Column B lists all points scored before the transfer period. Column A lists all points scored after the transfer period. The Overall (Ov) column lists the total amount of points scored in all matches played from Saturday 17 August - Sunday 10 November.

Also published today is the Top 50 League table (see left). It lists the overall top scoring Inde-

pendent Fantasy Football managers and their teams for matches played between Saturday 17 August - Sunday 3 November.

Results will be published every Wednesday in The Independent for all games played from the previous Monday to Sunday inclusive. They will also appear the following Sunday, in the Independent on Sunday. The overall Top 50 League table will be printed every Wednesday and again

on Sunday. Terms and conditions are as previously published and are available upon request.

SCORING SYSTEM

4 points for a goal ■ 4 points for a goalkeeper/defender clean sheet ■ 3 points for a successful assist ■ 1 point when a player is selected and plays ■ 1 point for a winning goal ■ 3 points for a manager win, 1 point for a draw ■ Loss 1 point for a yellow card ■ Loss 3 points for a red card

TEAM MARKET AND SCORES

OVERALL SCORE CALCULATED ON MATCHES PLAYED FROM 17 AUGUST - 10 NOVEMBER WEEK 13 SCORE CALCULATED ON MATCHES PLAYED FROM 4 - 10 NOVEMBER

CODE	PLAYER	TEAM	POINTS	VALUE	CODE	PLAYER	TEAM	POINTS	VALUE	CODE	PLAYER	TEAM	POINTS	VALUE	CODE	PLAYER	TEAM	POINTS	VALUE																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																				
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Pledge to end fixture congestion

Rugby Union
CHRIS HEWITT

One of the most influential figures in European rugby yesterday announced a new bridge-building exercise between major northern hemisphere clubs and their respective governing bodies aimed at halting the game's downward slide into black comedy.

Pickering, the chief executive of the Five Nations Committee, said he expected a cross-border fixtures schedule to be agreed at a meeting later this month.

Pickering, who is also tournament director of the Heineken European Cup, was speaking as officials from Cardiff and Bath voiced their concerns over the fixture congestion that has already seen four important league games cancelled in England because of Test call-ups.

While Pickering accepted that the die had been cast for this season, he insisted that a new pan-European fixture structure would be in place in time for the start of the 1997-98 campaign.

"It's at the top of the agenda and representatives of the Five Nations Committee will meet with club officials from all five leading countries before the end of November to thrash this out," he said.

"The fixtures for this season have already been agreed and it will be very difficult to change things at this stage, but by agreeing a structure for next season we can make it virtually impossible for these problems to arise again."

Importantly, Pickering acknowledged the primary of European rugby over domestic fixtures, although he indicated that national competitions would

continue to provide the backbone of activity in each country. Although a number of leading clubs want cross-border tournaments on a home and away basis next season, they are unlikely to get their way if the price is a diluted league programme.

Cardiff, who face Bath in a sell-out Heineken Cup quarter-final at the Arms Park on Saturday, are the latest club to be confronted with fixture difficulties. They play Sale in the Anglo-Welsh tournament tonight but will be forced to field a second-string side.

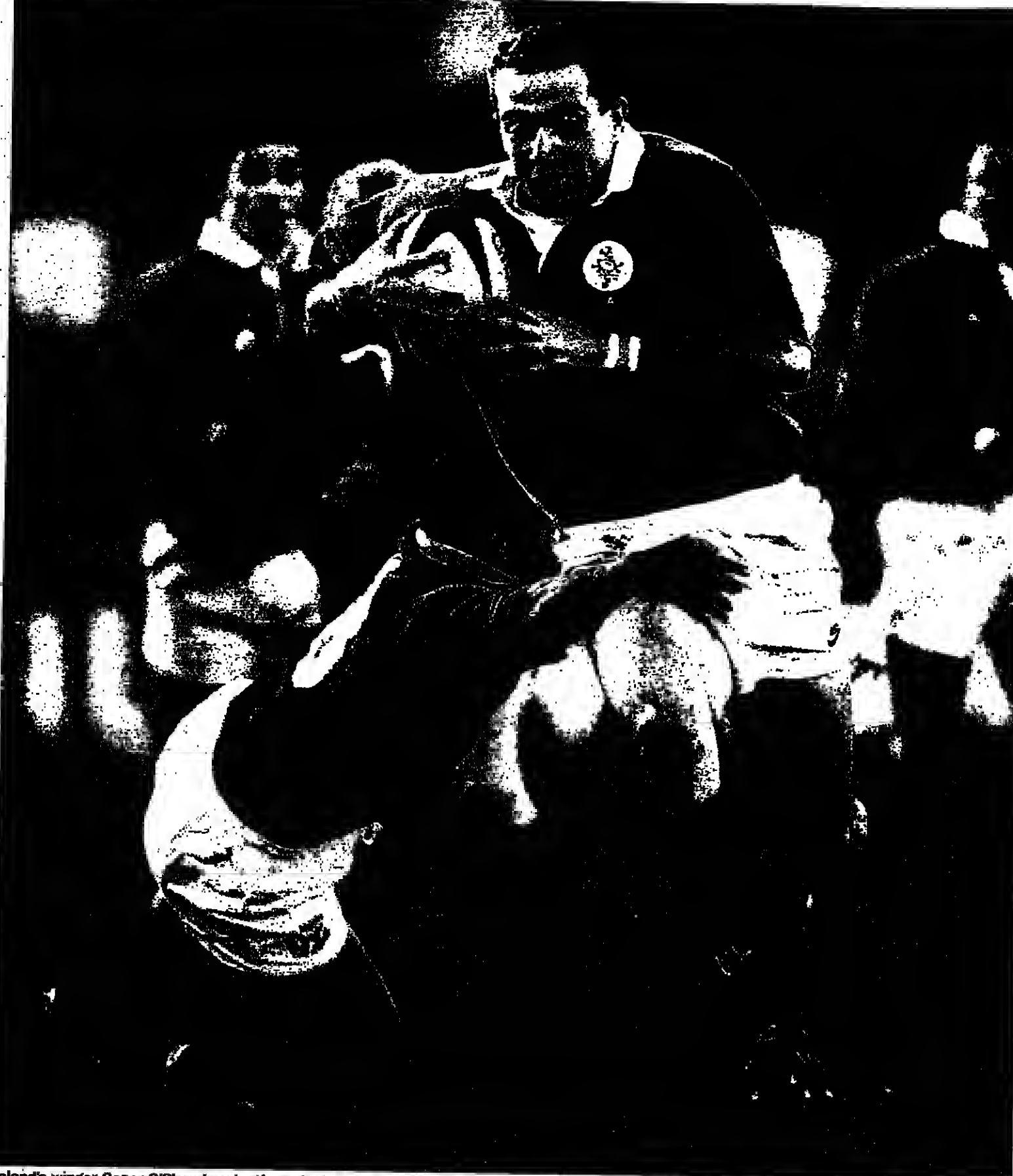
"I think the rugby league clubs learned the lesson some time ago that one game a week is enough for anyone," the Cardiff coach, Terry Holmes, said. "It's unfortunate, but none of our first choice players will face Sale for obvious reasons."

Holmes could hardly be blamed for playing safe as he already has a number of injury concerns in advance of the Bath showdown, with their outside-half, Jonathan Davies, and the loose forward Emyr Lewis facing late fitness tests on rib and finger injuries respectively.

Bath are even more vulnerable on the casualty front; they have lost the experienced forwards Graham Dawes and Richard Webster to knocks suffered during last Saturday's defeat at Northampton and will almost certainly be denied the services of the former England lock, Nigel Redman. He is still struggling with a groin condition sustained during the victory over Dax three weeks ago.

Italy have named a 21-man squad for their friendly against England at Twickenham on Saturday week. The back-rower Corrado Covi is recalled after a five-year absence while the captain, Massimo Cuttitta, has recovered from a thigh injury that forced him to miss last month's international against Australia.

IRISHMAN SQUAD (v England, Twickenham, Sat, 10.30): 1. P. O'Connell, 2. J. O'Connell, 3. J. O'Connell, 4. J. O'Connell, 5. J. O'Connell, 6. J. O'Connell, 7. J. O'Connell, 8. J. O'Connell, 9. J. O'Connell, 10. J. O'Connell, 11. J. O'Connell, 12. J. O'Connell, 13. J. O'Connell, 14. J. O'Connell, 15. J. O'Connell, 16. J. O'Connell, 17. J. O'Connell, 18. J. O'Connell, 19. J. O'Connell, 20. J. O'Connell, 21. J. O'Connell.



Ireland's winger Conor O'Shea breaks through the attempted tackle of South Africa's Gerald Schoitz during the A international at Donnybrook in Dublin yesterday. O'Shea scored a try in each half to help his side to a hard-fought 28-25 victory

Hall puts Cardiff game top of the bill

John Hall, Bath's director of rugby, yesterday described the European Cup quarter-final with Cardiff as "the biggest match in our history".

A sell-out 12,000 crowd will pack the Arms Park on Saturday despite live coverage on BBC Wales, confirming its billing as the biggest Anglo-Welsh club match ever. Between them, the sides boast 23 major domestic titles since 1981, while more than 20 full internationals could be involved in a clash that has Wales versus England written all over it.

Speaking in Cardiff, Hall said Bath intended putting patchy Courage League form behind them and keeping alive their European dream.

"We've already lost in this tournament at Pontypridd, and I expect Cardiff to be a better side than they were," he claimed. "By our standards, you could say that we have had a terrible start to the season. We are still playing some magnificent rugby, it's just that things are a little bit tougher now."

Bath's horizons do not end with Europe. The English champions are planning a two-match tour of South Africa next summer. They hope to play Natal in Durban and Western Province at Newlands, Cape Town.

Cardiff, who have also produced some erratic league performances this season, expect their injured international trio, Jonathan Davies, Derwyn Jones and Emyr Lewis, to return for Saturday.

Terry Holmes, the Cardiff coach, said: "Bath have been the most consistent English side for years. It will be a huge challenge for us, but if you want success at this level of competition then you have got to meet, and beat, the best. Let's hope the game lives up to its billing."

In Saturday's other quarter-finals, English rivals Leicester and Harlequins come face to face at Welford Road, while French giants Dax and Toulouse meet head on. Llanelli visit tournament favourites Brive on Sunday. The semi-finals are scheduled for 4-5 January with the final on 25 January.

SPORTING DIGEST

American football

NFL: San Diego 20 Detroit 22.

Baseball

Jake Robb, England's No 1 doubles player, has won domestic and international competition until the birth of his baby next summer on medical advice. She will miss England's semi-final series against China, which begins in Beijing today.

Basketball

London Towers of the Budweiser League, must win their final home games in the European Cup qualifying group against Telford on Saturday and against Podgorica of Yugoslavia in three weeks to be sure of qualification. And that would probably mean a London knock-

Pool

out to with Saratov Moscow in the last 32. London's remaining away games are against Ankara in Turkey and Kormend in Hungary.

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Football

Stevens Borough, the Vauxhall Conference champions, have been charged by the Football Association with bringing the game into disrepute. The charge relates to comments made by Victor Green, their chairman, during his unsuccessful High Court action against the Football League. Stevens were denied promotion to the League because they did not meet its ground requirements last season.

Cricket

SWANSEA CHAMPIONS TROPHY (Sheff/West): St Leger 189 (50 overs) M. Aisopu 4.

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SWANSEA CHAMPIONS TROPHY (Sheff/West): St Leger 189 (50 overs) M. Aisopu 4.

FA Cup

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Swimming's dreamer
Guy Hodgson meets the man who expects to give Britain gold, page 24

sport

The worst team in Britain
Keith Elliott speaks to the manager of the Stanford Arms, page 22

Juninho denies transfer rumours

Football
NICK DUXBURY

Juninho yesterday reassured Middlesbrough that he has no plans to leave Teesside, despite being quoted at length in Italian newspapers that he favoured a future in Milan or Turin.

"I don't know where these stories have come from about me leaving the club," the Brazilian striker said. "I am happy at Middlesbrough and I am pleased with the way things are going. The rumours that I want to leave are not true."

Earlier Middlesbrough supporters had to rely on an agent's soothing words that Juninho's departure was mere speculation and that his fellow-countryman, Emerson, was not about to quit either.

The Italian press had Juninho pouring scorn on English football and saying that he wanted a move to Serie A only a week after Emerson was also reported to be ready to leave the Premiership.

The situation will remain uncertain until they report back after the Premiership break tomorrow to prepare for Saturday's game at Derby County.

Juninho, signed last season from Sao Paulo for £4.75m, was quoted in the Italian press as saying: "I believe my best prospects lie with Inter Milan. I could also be a success with AC Milan or Juventus. The real problem with much of English football is its structure. Even the tiniest of clubs in Italy are better organised than those in England."

Hardly endearing stuff for Riversiders, but agent Gianni Paladini, who represents both players, was dismissive. "It's all speculation. I promise you. They [Juninho and Emerson] are world-class stars and you always get this kind of speculation. Because the trouble with Emerson has occurred, everyone is trying to pick up on how the players Middlesbrough have got are doing. Juninho never spoke to a paper."

However, Emerson will face his manager Bryan Robson when he returns from holiday

in Brazil, where the stories about his wanting to leave began. The midfielder cannot play against Derby because he is starting a three-match ban.

The Leeds manager George Graham has confirmed that he is interested in signing the Swiss international Ramon Vega, but is "a long way from any deal."

The 25-year-old centre-half would cost upwards of £3m from the Italian club Cagliari. "I'm interested in any quality players that become available, especially defenders. Vega falls into that category," said Graham, who has also been linked with Barcelona's Miguel Angel Nadal.

The Leeds wage bill will experience a substantial cut should Tomas Broin complete his return to Italy with Sampdoria. The 26-year-old Swedish striker is negotiating a loan contract until the end of the season with a view to a permanent move.

Leeds, who bought Broin for £4.5m from Parma a year ago, threatened legal action over his refusal to report back at Elland Road when his loan spell ended at FC Zurich.

John Aldridge has retired from international football to concentrate on his job as player-manager of First Division Tranmere Rovers.

Aldridge revealed his decision to the Republic of Ireland manager Mick McCarthy after being forced to sit on the substitutes' bench throughout Sunday's goalless World Cup qualifier with Iceland in Dublin.

The 38-year-old striker was hoping to score the goal which would have equalled Frank Stapleton's all-time Republic record of 20 goals.

David Hodgson, the former Middlesbrough and Liverpool striker, has returned to manage Third Division Darlington for the second time. Hodgson is back at Feethams almost a year after he walked out on a matter of principle, leaving Jim Platt in charge. Platt was sacked on Sunday six months after taking Darlington to the play-offs at Wembley. Hodgson is expected to appoint Gary Bannister as his second in command.

More football, page 22



Jeremy Bates on his way to victory against David Draper in the first round at Telford yesterday

Photograph: Gary Prior/Allsport

Henman eases through

Tennis

DERRICK WHITE
reports from Telford

Tim Henman, the defending champion, took just 58 minutes to win his opening match at the Guardian Direct British National Championships in Telford yesterday, beating qualifier Gregg Saffery of Berkshire 6-4, 6-2 in the first round.

The 22-year-old British No 1 said: "I'm a lot better player than I was a year ago. I can dominate a lot more with my service and that is very important on the ATP Tour. I'm also much better confidence-wise and experience-wise."

"I have had so many good moments this year and as the season is coming to a close you have time to reflect on them. Everything happened so much quicker than I expected."

"At the start of the year I was hoping to get into the top 50 and I knew it would be tough to achieve. But to break into the top 30 is very satisfying. I made six semi-finals this year and that makes it very exciting for next year. Now I have to try and do even better."

Henman was not expected to win the national title last year when Greg Rusedski was then Britain's top player. Rusedski won the first set in the final but Henman hit back strongly to take the last two sets. This year Henman is the undisputed favourite though Rusedski, who did not play yesterday, has been in superb form in the past few weeks. Henman revealed after his match with Saffery that he intends to play doubles next year with Jan Siemerink of the Netherlands.

Jeremy Bates, six-times champion, playing this year "only for fun", was serious enough to beat David Draper, the Northamptonshire left-hander 6-4, 6-4 in his first-round match.

Bates has played only two tournaments since Wimbledon when he retired from the ATP Tour. "That was in an over-35 tournament in Germany," he explained, "and I won it. I'm not 35 until next June but for some reason I didn't understand I was eligible to play in Germany after 1 October and it was fun."

"This, however, is my last appearance in the Nationals. It's a one-off. I have no aspirations this week but I thought I would like to play just once more because it is such a good tournament."

Bates, however, could win one title for he is playing doubles with Henman, with whom he won the event last year. Henman was expected to play with Neil Broad after their Olympic success but Broad was not available. "Tim asked me to play," Bates said. "I thought he was joking but it's good that he supports both singles and doubles."

In the women's singles the big shock was Lorna Woodroffe's 6-4, 6-4 victory over the second seed Rachel Violer, the British No 2, in the first round. Woodroffe, 20, broke in the first game to take the first set and then led 5-1 in the second. Violer made her last stand by winning three successive games before the Surrey player took the 10th game for victory. Earlier Abigail Tordoff, the 17-year-old from Kent, led Sam Smith 6-2, 5-4 before the top seed from Essex fought back to win 2-6, 7-5, 6-3.

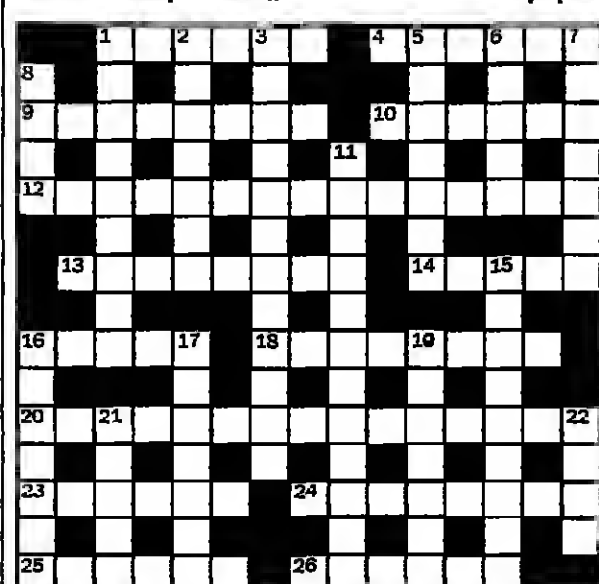
Results, Digest, page 25

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 2143, Wednesday 13 November

By Aquila

Tuesday's Solution



- ACROSS**
- Calm quarter day (6)
 - Imperturbable clan-leader in tartan (6)
 - Retired bloke fit, yet may be called up (8)
 - Defender taught to stand by (4,2)
 - Delivery breakdown (7,8)
 - Girls idiosyncrasy to be absent-minded (8)
 - One in diplomacy is understood (5)
 - Bundle of flowers a fellow presented to Ayesha (5)
 - Exegetic note heard in chugging (8)
 - Woeop bitterly over youth on terraces (3,4,5,3)
 - The Ring, perhaps, with spare parts? (6)
 - Enquiry agents in bath, say? (8)
 - Terminal next to river on brook (6)
- DOWN**
- Gleam of gladiator's leading weapon (6)
 - Immaculate, animated miners' leader (4,3)
 - Nobody in Holloway was such a chronicler (7)
 - One on wire loosens athlete's grip (12)
 - Bill, a flier (7)
 - King and ace played in bars (3)
 - Accumulation of silicon held in storehouse (7)
 - Rosemary, say, in embrace of another boy (4)
 - Number of ruminants let loose (12)
 - Study plan of meeting-place (9)
 - Crusoe's unusual energy-source (7)
 - Fellow not playing the game in amusement park (7)

19 Provide, at no extra cost, floor at home (5,2)
21 Surrender income?..... (5)
22time to seek job (4)

Collymore cleared by Evans

Stan Collymore will be in Liverpool's first-team squad for tonight's Coca-Cola Cup third-round replay against Charlton Athletic at Anfield, after being cleared of swearing at reporters during a reserve team match.

Roy Evans, the Liverpool manager, said yesterday: "He will be in the squad. Stan Collymore is an important member of our set-up."

Evans also issued a statement, after investigating allegations that the £8.5m striker had screamed abuse at reporters after scoring a goal during Saturday's reserve-team game. The comments were said to have been overheard by children.

Last week Liverpool fined Collymore £20,000 after failing to appear for a reserve match last Wednesday.

"After talking with people present, including supporters, the club have decided no action needs to be taken. That is the end of the matter," Evans said. "I'm not saying anything else as I don't want to make any more fodder for the newspapers."

Arsène Wenger, still smarting at having to deny rumours last week that he was about to quit Arsenal, yesterday cancelled his usual pre-match press conference.

Wenger, whose team are on Coca-Cola Cup replay duty

against Stoke City at Highbury tonight, has been the subject of unfounded rumours about his private life.

"I know who I am and what I am trying to achieve," the Frenchman said. "At the moment I just want to be left to get on with that."

An Arsenal spokesman said: "Mr Wenger is still very very angry. What he is doing amounts to putting the press in the sin bin for a period of time."

Wenger will end his protest after the Stoke game and relations with the media should be back to normal for Saturday's Premiership match at Manchester United.

Mountain men take to the field

Andorra might not have a currency or even a head of state to call its own, but from today it has a national football team to cheer on. The tiny mountainous country, sandwiched into a Pyrenean valley between France and Spain, is famous for ski slopes and duty-free shopping but when 11 Andorran take to the field against Estonia they will also be known as the world's youngest footballing nation.

However, the chances of an upset in today's friendly are slim - the country has no professional league and fewer than 300 registered players. And the side sounds more like a jury than a team, consisting of bank clerks, civil servants, accountants, salesmen, construction workers, a lift repairman, an electrician and a hotel manager.

Nevertheless the game has generated enormous interest

James Corrigan looks at the world's newest footballing nation: Andorra

amongst the 64,000 inhabitants of Andorra, of whom only 19,000 are actually Andorran. "There is a lot of euphoria, a lot of expectation," said David Carpa, the general secretary of the Andorra Football Federation, who anticipates a full house of 1,000 spectators.

About half the population are Spanish, while there are also sizeable Portuguese and French communities in a country where most people speak both Spanish and French in addition to the native Catalan tongue. The country is already finding about international football the hard way as they are not allowed to

absorb players from FC Andorra, which is largely composed of Spaniards and plays in the Spanish Third Division. Twenty-five years' residence is necessary for naturalisation and double nationality is prohibited.

One FC Andorra player, Felix Alvarez, is awaiting permission from FIFA to play with a temporary passport after marrying a local girl, and the former Barcelona striker Julio Lucendo is in a similar position.

Financial restraints also threaten to hamper the rise of Andorra. The federation has an annual budget of only eight million pesetas (£40,000), but Carpa is undaunted. "Look what the Faroe Isles have done," he said. "This will really help the country. It's like this before we play Estonia, imagine what it would be like if England or West Germany came."

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